SHORT STORIES

argosy

John Wyndham

Stuart Cloete

Jack Schaefer

Alfred Hitchcock

James Thurber

MARCH — 2/6

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ARGOSY

A *Fleetway* magazine

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JOHN WYNDHAM

Cheers to The Triffids

JOHN WYNDHAM, medium height, slightish, presents a totally unalarming exterior. He doesn't, at first sight, have the look of a man whose brain harbours sinister Triffids or millibrachiate tentacular coelenterates; he seems much more like those leisured, country-dwelling writers of the thirties whose first names—as he himself said—often seemed to be Gerald . . . His face is egg-shaped, cheerful-complexioned—but one does, after a while, begin to notice the sceptical, faintly worried expression of someone who often hears very odd rumours indeed of queer doings in small, far-distant fishing-ports . . .

Interviewed in a small Hampshire pub, where he was spending a winter holiday, Mr. Wyndham divided his attention between the unexpected sunshine, the magnificently Persian pub cat, and the problem of how he writes his books.

Q. Had you always wanted to write?

— Yes, but my family felt that literature was an unreliable profession, so I tried my hand at other jobs first. Then I concentrated on writing stories for the pulp market—mainly American magazines. In World War II, I became a Civil Servant, before joining the Signals. I didn't write much—conditions weren't suitable. I need peace and quiet to work. I can't write with a mob round me; I admire journalists and people who can write in trains—Buchan did, didn't he?

Q. Do you enjoy writing?

— Yes—yes, I do, but I don't enjoy the thinking out that comes first—that awful business of trying to work out a plot. The trouble about writing is that you have to think about it all the time, you don't have an office you can shut for the day. Wrestling with an unformed idea is exhausting. Detective

writers score there, because they have a pattern to start from. I have a basic premise—like the one in *Trouble With Lichen*, for instance, human life prolonged indefinitely—and then have to decide how to make it into a story.

Q. Do you prefer short stories or novels?

— It's *easier* to write short stories. You can get the whole scheme into your mind beforehand. With my books I often make several starts—I've had three with the one I'm working on now—I'm always beginning at the wrong place or focusing on the wrong character.

(Mr. Wyndham chuckled, and the pub cat stretched out into a new decorative attitude.)

Q. Is it true that *The Day of the Triffids* is being filmed?

— Yes, the contract's been signed. The last I heard was of a design for a Triffid—kind of a rubber suit, with a man inside, with two feet in front and an extra one behind containing a compressed-air spring so that he could hop along.

Q. What did you think of *The Midwich Cuckoos* film, *Village of the Damned?*

— Jolly good, better than I had expected. They managed to make the "cuckoos" very horrifying by choosing brown-eyed children and putting them into blonde nylon wigs so that their eyes seemed to stand out. In the American version it was even more frightening as the eyes were whited over—and in the burning-house scene the eyes came flying out by themselves . . .

(At this point the pub cat climbed up on to your correspondent, drooling vigorously.)

Q. Which of your books do you yourself prefer?

— None! When I've finished one I always think it's awful. In three or four years it seems better, then I forget it. When people mention names or incidents my mind's a blank. The book they bring up most often is *The Chrysalids*, the one Argosy serialised. Incidentally Clemence Dane suggested that title.

Q. What are your best circumstances for writing?

— I like to be on the verge of boredom—then I start writing to occupy myself. That's why I live in London. I'd love to have a cottage down here in Steep—I went to school (Bedales) nearby and have friends here, but I know if I lived in the country I'd always find something to do, chopping wood or gardening, as an excuse not to write . . .

(The pub cat stalked out.)

They have a dog here too, said John Wyndham, a blind poodle. It knows its way by instinct round all the local lanes.

Characteristically he had picked on the one element in this pleasant country scene which was odd, unexpected, out of key . . .

IN THIS MONTH'S ARGOSY

Stuart Cloete was born in Paris, high up on a fifth floor, and he assures us that the first sound he can remember was the screaming of the swifts. Child of a Scots mother and South-African-Dutch father, he was educated in England and France, joined the army at 17, and was in France from 1916 until the end of World War I, was twice wounded, and retired on pension to farm his family's land in France.

After ranching in South Africa he bought his 1,600 acre farm.

In 1933 he began writing seriously, leading off with 300 poems and then moving on to short stories. For three years he sold nothing, but his luck changed when his novel *Turning Wheels* in 1937 was a Book Club choice in both England and America. Since then he has written a series of best-sellers, including *Congo Song* and *Mamba* (which we serialised.)

Edward Lindall is the pen-name of an Australian journalist. (He tells us he coined it by amalgamating the names of his two small daughters Kendall and Lindsay.) Dark-haired, bespectacled, he was turned down by the R.A.A.F. on account of defective vision, served in an infantry battalion in the Middle and Far East. After the war he married, worked on an Australian, then on a Manchester newspaper, did a stint in the London office of the *Melbourne Herald*, and took to spare-time writing. He's now back in Australia, but somewhat homesick for England.

Rona Jaffe, up-and-coming young American writer, has two novels to her credit, both of which explore the subtleties, tensions, and discords in the male-female relationship. In her first, *The Best of Everything*, she cast a sharp eye at the difficulties besetting brilliant career girls in New York offices; *Away From Home* probes the troubles lurking under happy marriages.

James Thurber, world-famous cartoonist and humorist, born at Columbus, Ohio, in 1894, not long ago went on the stage for the first time in a 12-minute sketch in his own show on Broadway, *A Thurber Carnival.* He was a hit. He is now discussing a London production of the show.

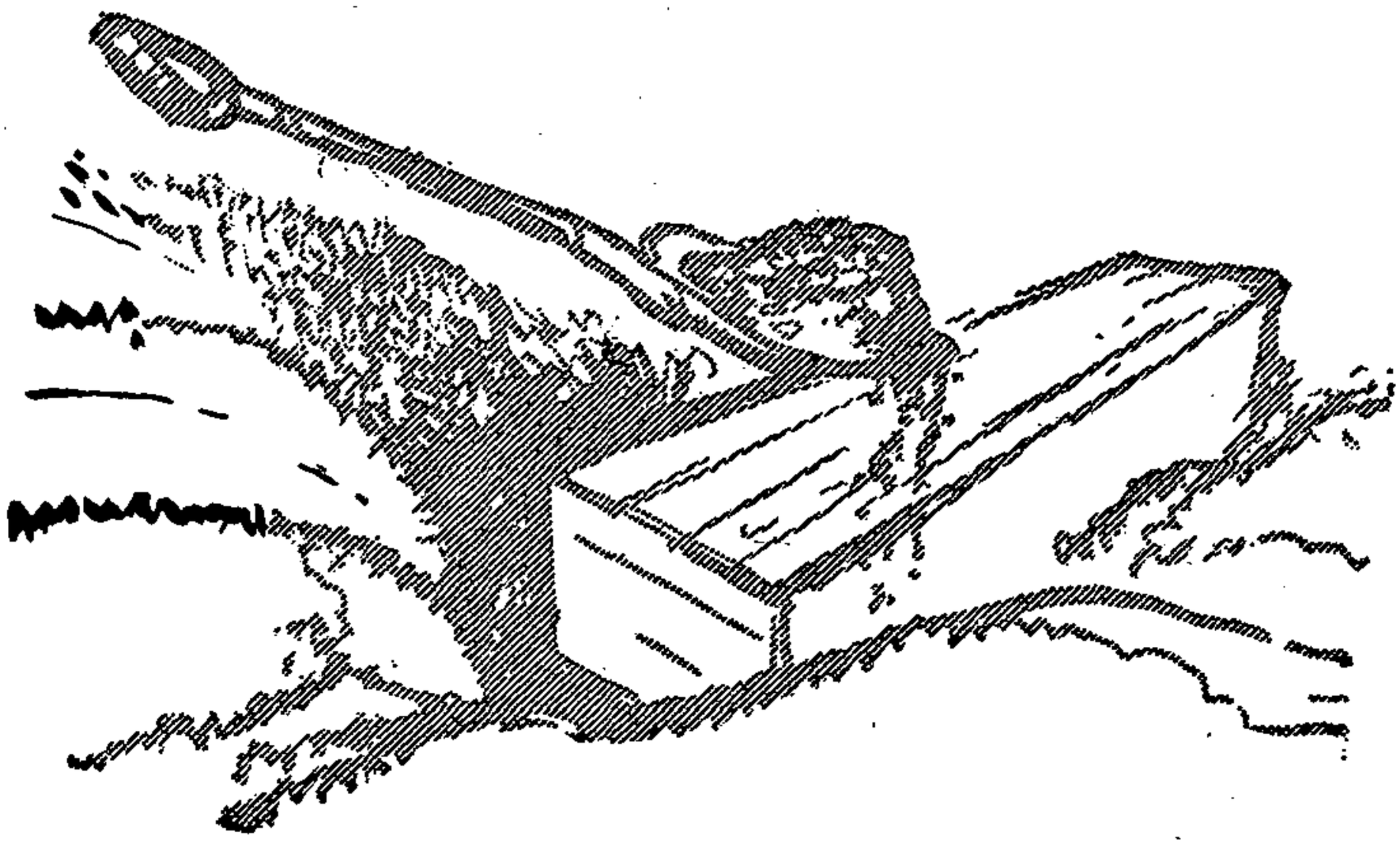
Thurber—apart from troubled autobiography like *The Night the Bed Fell on Father*—is best known for his attitudes to women and dogs—he coined the resounding phrase, "Woman's place is in the wrong." However he recently admitted that the toughness of the female sex would probably ensure the continuance of the human race. And as for dogs—well, we're bringing you a slice from Thurber's dog-life this month.

ONE GRAVE TOO MANY

By HENRY SLESAR

ALFRED HITCHCOCK

creator of ROPE and VERTIGO, with his famous gimmick of always appearing himself, hooded eyed, for a quick sinister flash in each of his films. What is he like at home ? A mild tubby little man, happily married for 36 years (surely a record in Hollywood where he lives) who likes to watch the telly after dinner (especially his own series, Alfred Hitchcock Presents) and be in bed by nine. Now in Argosy we proudly present Alfred Hitchcock's Choice of the Month. The first of these is by the author of that grim and unforgettable story, Penthouse Cry.



THERE was so much rage and frustration in Joe Helmer's mind that there was no room for ordinary reasoning. Ten minutes after he had climbed aboard, he realised he had taken the wrong bus, wasted a precious nickel and dime on a ride that took him ten blocks short of his destination. He cursed his stupidity aloud, and the swaying homegoing strap-hangers beside him looked him over with dull, vacant eyes.

It was Irene's fault, of course. He had telephoned her from the cinema where he had spent the rainy afternoon, and all he got was a renewal of the argument they had had at breakfast. She just didn't understand the way it was with him, the way he felt inside when he saw grubby workmen sweating for their dough, or mousy chaps with glasses behind cold metal desks, waiting for their weensy pay packets every Friday.

He couldn't be like them, not Joe Helmer. It was better to be unemployed, to be patient, to wait for the real break. He knew it would happen; the right deal was just around a corner some place; a smart guy had to wait. He couldn't just jump at anything.

Things were getting tough. He thought they had their creditors stalled, stalled until he could land the right spot and the right dough. Then one morning, Irene had shrieked banshee-like at the dripping water in a refrigerator that wasn't getting electric power. Then there was silence in the telephone receiver. Then there was the curt letter from the building management, talking about eviction. So Joe made the rounds, saying no to the cheap jobs they offered him, fuming at the cool reception he got from white-collar personnel managers. In remembered anger, he glared at the well-dressed man jostling his elbow in the bus.

The bus squealed to a halt at 24th Street, last stop on the line. Still cursing, he followed the passengers into the dark street. He was broke; he'd have to walk home.

He found himself behind the well-dressed man, and hated the smooth cut of his well-tailored suit. The man walked briskly; he was a stout, short-legged man, close to sixty, but he walked with the spring of youth. /That's what money can do for you, Joe thought.

The streets were empty. The man turned the corner at 21st Street, and Joe, who had to cut three blocks west anyway, turned with him. The sound of their dual footsteps were loud on the quiet street. Click, click, went the man's metal-tipped heels. Clomp, clomp, went Joe's rundown heels.

They walked two blocks together, single file, like a two-man parade. Then, some twenty yards ahead of him, the man stopped.

Joe stopped too, curious as to the suddenness of his action. He saw the man clutching his arm, and then loosening his shirt collar in a desperate attempt to get air into his windpipe.

Joe walked closer and the man wheeled about.

For a moment, he caught Joe's eyes and made a mute appeal for help But there was nothing Joe could do for him; the

man stumbled forward and fell in a clumsy heap on the pavement.

Joe stared, numbed by surprise. He knew the man was sick, maybe dead, but he didn't want to take part in the drama; he had his own troubles. He walked forward slowly, looking round at the unresponsive brick houses that lined the avenue, hoping for signs of someone who would take the responsibility out of his hands.

But there was no one. He came to the side of the fallen man, and said, "Hey, mister. You O.K.?"

The question sounded insane even to his own ears. The man wasn't O.K.; his silence, the inertness of his body told the story. Joe reached down and gingerly lifted the plump wrist from the pavement, feeling for the pulse. He was awkward, uncertain, but he could not detect a beat. He put his hand over the man's open mouth, and the skin of his palm didn't warm to any breath.

He stood up, brushing his hands against his trousers, looking up and down the deserted street. Then he remembered to look in the man's coat for identifying papers.

He took the bulky wallet from the inside pocket. It sprang open in his hands, and he saw the dollar bills.

How could he miss them? There were maybe twenty of them, thirty. They were nice-sized bills, fives and tens and twenties, and an occasional fifty. They added up. They added up nicely.

He stared so hard at the money in his hand that he forgot his original intention. All he could think about was the decision he had to make.

He looked down at the dead man. Natty was the word for him. A small moustache coursed under his nose. His open mouth was placid, and his eyes were closed. He looked peaceful. What good was his money now?

Joe Helmer, almost indifferently, slipped the wallet into his hip pocket. Then he walked backwards a few steps, watching the body. Finally, he turned and broke into a rapid stride that became a trot two blocks later. He didn't stop trotting until he was within sighting distance of the shabby block of flats where Irene waited, still nursing the wounds inflicted by their early-morning argument.

Then he walked calmly up the front steps. He walked slowly up the three flights to their door. He entered, smiling, to see Irene soaking nylons in the kitchen sink.

"Well?" she said, turning to face him.

"Not much luck," he said casually.

He went to the refrigerator for a beer, and then remembered

about the electricity. Frowning, he took a warm bottle from the shelf and brought it to the table.

He uncapped it, and said, "Things are slow up town; this recession's got everybody scared. But I ought to land something next week."

She came over to him, a woman surprisingly attractive in spite of hardship. She brushed a hand through short uncurled hair, and her nostrils widened.

"What movie did you see?"

"Don't talk like that, Irene, I spent the whole day looking."

"I'll bet."

"I tell you I looked. As a matter of fact, I had a little luck this afternoon. Ran into a guy I knew in the Army, and what do you think? He remembered about some dough he owed me. I got him out of a real jam once, and he remembered. Shows there are nice people in the world."

She looked suspicious. "Are you kidding?"

"Of course I'm not kidding. Want to see the money?"

"Sure," she said, folding her thin arms. "Let's see it. I don't know if I'll recognise the stuff, but let's try."

He grinned and reached into his hip pocket. He slipped out the thick wad of bills and fanned them on the table like a bridge hand. He got a kick out of seeing her eyes pop.

"For the love of Mike!" Irene said. "How much *is* that, Joe?"

"Why not count it?"

She did, hurriedly, her eyes already making plans for spending it.

"Three hundred and seventy-five dollars!"

"Exactly what he owed me," Joe said smugly, pleased with himself.

"This is wonderful! We can give Mr. Peterson fifty for the rent—he can wait for the March payment. And the grocer will take a hundred. And then we can call the electric and telephone companies—"

"Hey, take it easy," Joe chuckled. "Leave a couple of bucks for a steak dinner. We owe it to ourselves, huh?"

"Oh, Joe," Irene said, going into his arms the way she did when they were first married, the way Joe liked her.

In the bedroom, alone, Joe opened the empty wallet.

There were two pockets, both with plastic windows. The first held a card that said: *Marvin Horine, 8 East 70th Street.*

But Joe stared at the second window without comprehending the strange words printed on the white card. He read them over twice before their meaning became clear.

I AM NOT DEAD

I am subject to a form of cataleptic illness which may appear to cause death. If I am found, notify at once:

Dr. Nelson Kruger
441 East 64th Street
MUrray Hill 3-0010

He dropped the wallet on the bed as if discovering it contained some virulent plague germs. Then he stared at it, and felt the cold seep over his arms and legs until he thought he was going to be sick himself. He pictured the face upturned on the pavement—the natty little moustache and the peaceful open mouth. Then he saw another picture in his brain, and the thought struck him with emphatic horror. A hole in the earth, and a plain wooden box, and a shovel dumping earth on the boards . . .

He sat on the bed and shut his eyes, creating a darkness he could think in. He thought and thought, but not with any logic or purpose.

He got up from the bed and saw his own face in the mirror. It was white, bloodless; he hardly recognised it.

Then Joe stirred himself into action. He pocketed the wallet and went into the kitchen, pulling on his jacket. Irene was at the stove, humming to herself. She looked round when he came in and started to say something. He stopped her with, "Irene, give me five bucks."

"What?"

"I need five bucks," he said sharply. "Don't ask me why."

"But I thought we talked it over. I thought we weren't going to touch that money, either of us. Not until all the bills were paid—"

"Irene, I *need* it. Don't argue with me!"

Her mouth pouted, but she went to the coffee tin on the shelf and brought it down. She rifled through the loose jumble of bills until she found the right denomination. He snatched it from her hand greedily, and then, as if feeling guilty, kissed her on the cheek.

"I really need it, honey," he said placatingly. "I'll tell you about it some other time, but I really need it. I'll be back in a little while." He went to the door.

"Joe," Irene said.

"It's all right, honey," Joe said, and moved rapidly down the stairs to the street.

He had a hard time looking for a taxi; it wasn't a neighbourhood for profitable cruising. Then he spotted one close to Broadway, and hurried across the street.

He gave the address, the spot where the man had fallen, the place where he had made his decision.

They reached it in less than five minutes in the light traffic. He hopped out of the cab at the intersection, not wanting to pull up at the exact site. He walked slowly, without evident purpose, round the corner.

He expected to find things different, and he did. But still he was shocked—shocked at the silence of the scene, at the absence of the body. There was a police car, its engine idling, some twenty yards from where the victim had been found. Otherwise—absolutely nothing.

He ambled towards the prowl car, not knowing what to say or how to begin saying it.

" Evening, officer . . ."

The cop in the front seat looked at him, looked at his seedy clothes and inquiring face. Then he nodded back, noncommittally.

" Some excitement around here? " Joe said.

" Man dropped dead, that's all," the officer grunted. " They took him off a few minutes ago." His eyes went curious. " You know anything about it? "

" Who, me? Not a thing," Joe said, backing away. " Just heard the ambulance, that's all. Just curious . . ."

He moved away, trying to walk nonchalantly and almost stumbling over his own feet. He didn't glance back until he reached the far corner, and by that time the car had gunned its way to other problems.

Then Joe knew he could do no more. He had gone this far, but that was all he had in him. It was tough, it was too bad, it was the way the world was made. Maybe some smart medic at the police department would recognise the ailment, know the man wasn't really dead. Maybe he was all right, this Marvin Horine, 8 East 70th Street. Maybe he was sitting up right now, smoking and chatting away . . .

Joe hailed another cab. It cost him fifty cents, plus tip, to make it back home. He walked in and took the remaining three-fifty from his pocket, and solemnly deposited it in the coffee tin as Irene watched. She didn't ask any questions.

Then he went to bed.

He woke up sweating so hard that the sheets were slippery. Beside him, Irene said, " Joe, Joe, what's the matter with you? "

" What is it? What time is it? "

" I don't know." She peered at the alarm clock on the bedside table. " Seven-thirty. You better get up."

He groaned, and put his face in the pillow. "Naw, I'm too tired. I didn't sleep."

"You're not going to look today?"

"Sure, I'll look, I'll look. Gimme time."

"Then you ought to get started. You know it's best to get out early, Joe. The whole day goes before you know it."

He grunted.

"Joe, that money won't last us for ever."

The mention of the money brought him fully awake. He sat up in the bed and reached for a cigarette. He lit it and smoked it down to half an inch, thinking about last night. Then he got up and hurriedly dressed.

He put coffee in the percolator, and started the stove. He watched the brown liquid bubble in the glass cap as if hypnotised by the volatile motion.

Then he sat down at the kitchen table, and studied the wall-paper.

I'm a murderer, he thought.

He didn't call himself a thief. Everybody was some kind of thief, one way or another. It was all a matter of degree, the way Joe saw it.

But a murder—even by default—that was something else. That was a thought that made his stomach shrink, that made the sweat frost on his arms and neck. A voice out of his childhood, quoting scripture, talking fire and brimstone, came into his head. He felt weak, like a kid, and frightened.

He was letting the man die, and for what? Three hundred and seventy-five bucks! When he compared it to his youthful dreams, to his plans for thousand-dollar deals, for big-time investments in real estate, lumber, steel companies, it seemed like nothing at all. Sure, the money came in handy now, if only to dam Irene's nagging voice. But what did it buy him? Another month in this flat? A lifetime of bad dreams and sweaty sheets?

He listened for the sound of Irene in the bedroom. She wasn't stirring; he could hear her deep regular breathing.

Then he tiptoed downstairs.

Two blocks from the house there was a café. He stepped into a phone booth, called the operator, and asked for the police department.

"Listen," he told the authoritative voice that answered. "That guy who dropped dead on 21st Street last night—"

"One second," the voice interrupted. "Now what was that name?"

"What's it matter? The guy that you found wasn't really

dead. He only *looked* dead. He had some kind of illness—"

"Who are you kidding?"

Joe rubbed his neck. "I'm serious," he said. "The guy had a kind of fit, that's all. But you shouldn't bury him. Understand? You shouldn't bury him."

There was a pause, and then the voice said—too pleasantly, "Tell you what. Why don't you come down here and tell us all about it? All right?"

Joe looked at the receiver, and knew what the officer was thinking. The idea angered him; he cursed, and hung up savagely. It was no use; they'd never believe an unidentified voice on the phone. There had to be another way.

Then he remembered. The doctor! The doctor Marvin Horine had listed in his wallet. Now what was his name? Joe pinched his forehead. Something with a K. Kramer? Klein? He smacked his fist against the wall of the booth, jarring his memory.

Kruger, that was it!

He stepped outside and burrowed through the Manhattan directory until he found the Murray Hill number. Then he dialled it, and waited anxiously until the answer came.

"Dr. Kruger," the girl said.

"Let me speak to him," Joe told her. "It's urgent—"

"I'm sorry, Dr. Kruger's not available. If I could take a message—"

"Where is he? I must talk to him!"

"He's on holiday. Miami, I think. If you'll give me your name—"

"Never mind that. Do you know anything about a patient named Marvin Horine?"

"I'm sorry, sir."

"But aren't you the nurse?" Joe asked.

"This is an answering service," the voice said.

Joe hung up.

There wasn't any alternative now. He could take his life in his hands and walk flat-footed into the police station. He could explain it to them in person, let them see that he wasn't a drunk or a crank. He could conceal his own part in the business, if he played it smart. But he had to convince them, had to make them know the truth before the shovel started piling earth on the planks . . .

He walked out of the café, and headed slowly for the police station. The sergeant at the front desk didn't even look up at him, until he said, "I'm the one who telephoned about the guy who dropped dead on 21st Street."

The officer brought two bushy brows together, and then smiled. "Oh yeah. Have a seat, mister. Lieutenant Bates will talk to you about it; I told him what you said."

A minute later, a round-headed man in a rumpled grey suit came out of the back room. He was polite, like a TV cop. He took Joe into a shabby office in the rear and let him say it all over again.

"Twenty-first Street, huh?" Bates scratched at a pad with a stubby pencil; from where he sat, Joe could see they were only doodles. "Short oldish guy with a moustache; maybe sixty?"

"Yeah, that's him."

"And you don't think he's dead, mister?"

"I *know* he's not."

"He looked pretty dead when they brought him in last night. No heartbeat, no breathing, no nothing. The doctor who examined him said he was dead. They wrote out a death certificate this morning. Heart failure, it said. And now he's in the morgue, waiting for burial." Lieutenant Bates spread his hands. "So you see, Mr. Helmer, there's nothing for you to worry about. Go home and get a good rest."

Joe's palm slapped the table. "You think I'm crazy! You think I'm some kind of nut!"

Bates smiled. "I didn't say that, Mr. Helmer."

"But that's what you think, right?" He put his hands on the table and leaned forward. "But you'll find out different. You'll see what happens when the guy's doctor gets back to town—"

"What gave you this idea, Mr. Helmer? What makes you so sure?"

"Because—" Joe swallowed. "Because I saw the guy's wallet. I saw a card in it, that said so. It—"

"We didn't find any card."

"I must have dropped it. I—I was scared."

"Scared of what?"

"Stop pickin' on me!" Joe shouted. "I don't know what happened to his wallet. All I know is that he's alive, and that's how you're going to bury him—"

"Did you take the wallet?" asked the cop.

"No!"

"You sure about that?" the cop said gently.

"All right!" Joe Helmer screamed. "So I took his wallet! I thought he was dead. I thought he wouldn't need the dough any more, that's what I thought. Only you got to get a doctor for him."

Lieutenant Bates stared at him thoughtfully. Then he picked up the telephone on his desk.

"Max? Has that stiff been transferred to the city morgue yet, or is he still in the freezer? . . . He is? Good."

He hung up. "Would you come with me, Mr. Helmer?"

Joe followed him, across the front room of the police station to a door that led below. In a musty chamber, the lieutenant unlocked a door with a frosted glass pane, and they stepped inside a basement room damp with cold.

"This way, Mr. Helmer."

The cop walked towards a grey stone slab and pulled the sheet from the face of the body that rested on its surface.

"Can you identify this man?" he said.

Joe looked.

"Yes," he gulped. "That's him. That's Marvin Horine."

Bates shook his head. "No, Mr. Helmer. We know who this man is, and his name's not Horine. His name's Capper, Sonny Capper. We've known him for a long, long time."

"You have?"

"It's our job to know men like Sonny. He was one of the slickest pickpockets in the east, until that heart of his gave out. Now would you mind coming upstairs, Mr. Helmer? We've got some talking to do."

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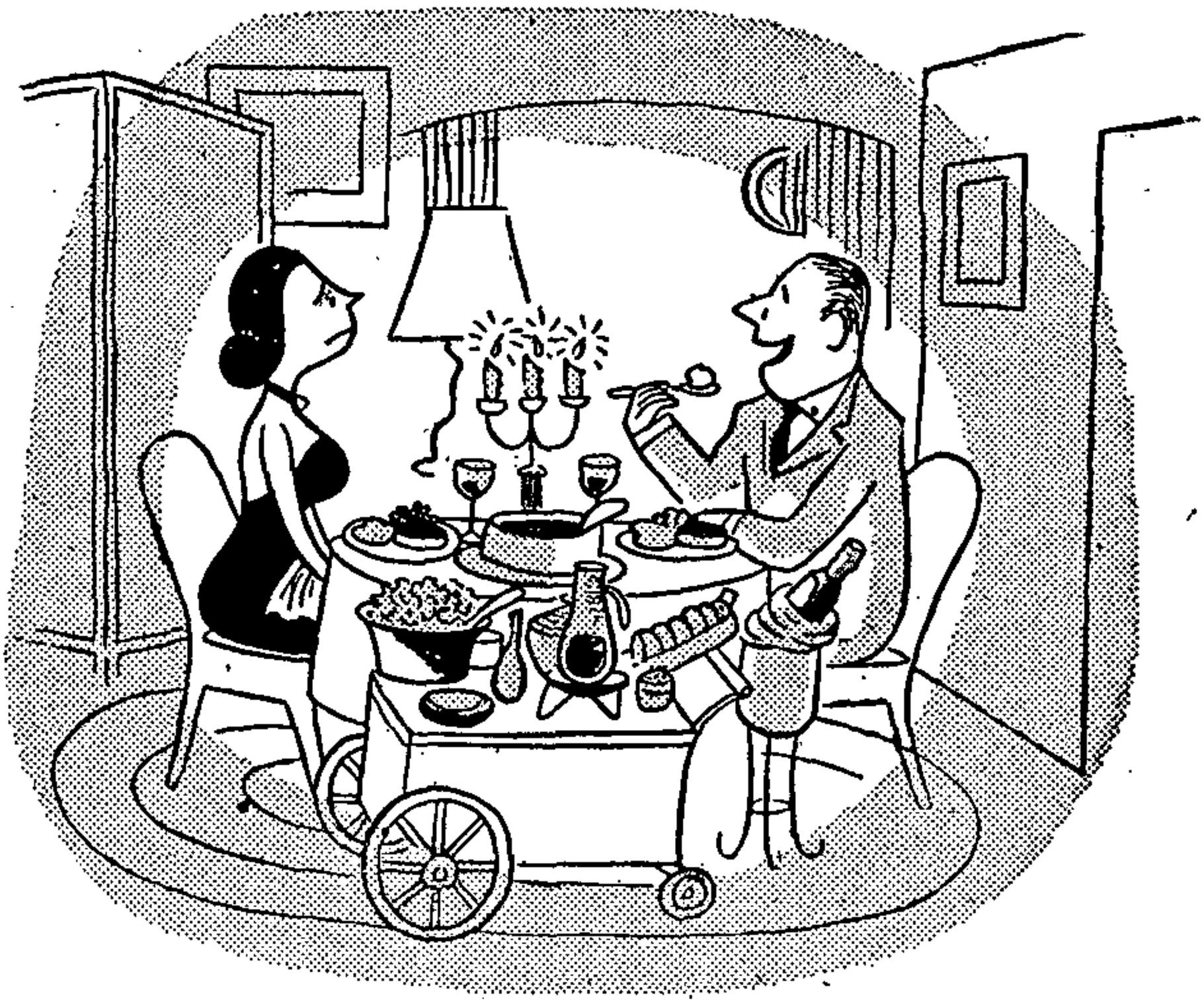

"It's times like this when I feel a little sorry I'm a confirmed bachelor."

KING OF THE VELD

" What is it ? " she said.
The dogs stared into the moonlight

BY STUART CLOETE

SHE was curled up on the sofa in the living-room. It had needed a new loose cover for years. The big red roses had faded to pink, and the pink to white. She was trying to think of things like that—think of anything except the next week or so, when she would be alone.

" You've got the gun and the dogs, Barbara," her father said. " I should be back in a week. But there's nothing to fear. And there's the car. If anything happens, you can drive to the dorp in four hours."

I can, she thought, if there has not been a storm and the car does not break down.

They were just making conversation. Both of them knew it. John Barton was not at all happy about leaving his daughter alone on the farm for a week. But he had no option. Someone had to stay, and the cattle he had bought had to be brought up from the low veld. Botha, who had been driving them up, had died of fever on the road. One of the boys had brought the news.

" It'll take me two days to get there, Barbs, if I drive hard, and four or five to get them back here."

" Yes, Dad." Barbara's big grey eyes rested on her father's face. He looks tired already, she thought. Of course, he wasn't young any more, and there was a lot at stake. All they had was in this cattle deal, a speculation that, if it came off, would put them on their feet.

She didn't like being left alone. Not that she was afraid, but she wasn't happy about it. She would be bored and lonely.

" You're twenty-two," her father said.

Barbara smiled at him. She had a pretty smile.

" Twenty-two," her father said again, " and you ought to have a couple of kids at foot by now."

The girl laughed outright. " I'd like that," she said, " but I'd need help."

"That's it," her father said. "You've got to get away from here. There's not a young man within a hundred miles of us. Just a few louts that would marry you for the farm and run it into the ground."

"You worry about me, don't you, Dad?" Barbara went over to her father and kissed his forehead. "Don't. I'm all right." But she knew she wasn't all right at all. She wanted to meet a man she could love and marry, and here they were, shadow-boxing again. Deceiving each other, yet not really deceiving each other at all.

"I want to be off before it's light, Barbs."

"I'll fix up the food, Dad," Barbara said. She began to tick off items on her fingers, "Biltong, mealie meal, meat, tea, coffee, bread, rusks, sugar, salt, flour, bacon, bully beef, sardines, condensed milk, tobacco, matches, brandy." She'd hard-boil three dozen eggs.

The dawn was just breaking when Barbara watched her father drive off in the Cape cart with four horses. He had Ben, a good stock boy, with him, and the boy who had brought the news of Botha's death. Two saddles and bridles were stowed with the rations, cooking-pots, and bedding behind the seat. Her father and Ben would ride two of the horses back. One of the other boys would drive the cart.

The cold, fishbelly-grey of the eastern horizon slowly changed to pink. The outline of the old thorns that stood near the house sharpened as patches of bright light filtered through the foliage. Between the gnarled branches spots of red sky made curious stained-glass-like designs. The dogs, standing one on each side of her, pushed their noses into her hand. She stroked their heads absently, still staring into the east. The light was increasing fast. The upper sky was turning blue—sky blue that merged into lilac, into pale green and lemon yellow as she watched it.

Well, he's gone, and I'm on my own, she thought, and turned her back on the sun. "Come on, boys," she said to the dogs. Bodo and Bismarck were three years old—brothers—half Alsatian and half Airedale. With them at her heels she went into the house, holding open the spring door of the netted stoep for the dogs to come in.

Barbara went into the long low-ceilinged lounge. It was comfortably furnished, almost cosy in a Victorian way. Some of the big mahogany stuff was Victorian. It had belonged to her grandfather, and been brought out from England after his death.

The floor was covered with Persian carpets and lionskins that

were beginning to look the worse for wear. But her father would not part with them. "They're a part of my life, Barbs, and that one—" he had pointed to a big black-maned skin—"could have been the end of it. Shabby," he had said, "and I'm getting shabby too. They were fine once—kings of the veld who'd never known defeat until we met. Top animals, they were, Barbs, and I was a top man. Your mother was alive then," he said, as if this explained everything.

This was one of the few times he'd ever spoken of her. He had loved her too much to be able to mention her, but Barbara knew that for him she was still here standing at his side.

Her father had poured a brandy and water and then said, "When she went, I died in a way. If it hadn't been for you, I should have. I still can't talk about her. We had something special—one mind, one heart, one flesh. And she was beautiful, Barbs. She stood out from everyone else like a Kaffir boom in the veld, like a candle in the night."

"You'd not have—"

"No, dear. I'd never have committed suicide. I'd just have let go. In those days up here you had to hang on to your life as if it were a raft. You had to take care of yourself. That was something a lot of them never found out, and they died. It wasn't just fever, Kaffirs, or wild animals like lions or leopards, or the crocs that got you. It was this." He held up his glass.

"It was not shaving, not washing, not changing your clothes. It was allowing yourself to go downhill till, when fever hit you badly, you just gave up. You had no guts left, no pride left in yourself. Never forget, Barbs, that there can be no courage without pride."

So that was why he changed into clean clothes every evening, why he had always made her brush her hair one hundred strokes each day. Only now that she was grown up did she realise what an impossible thing he had done in rearing and educating a young girl a hundred miles from the nearest railway, three hundred miles from a decent town, with only an old Kaffir to help him.

Barbara went into the dining-room. The breakfast things were still on the table—the egg-stained plates covered with a scum of bacon fat, the dirty knives and forks, the cups with tealeaves in them. She wished they could stay like that. It made her feel that he might be back any minute. She put the plates on the floor for the dogs to lick. She called Jim.

"I'd like some more tea, Jim," she said. He went out with the teapot. There was just the sound of his bare, horny soles on the floor and the rattle of plates as the dogs finished cleaning them up.

When she had drunk her tea, Barbara began her usual routine. She went to look at the poultry. She had four hens sitting that were due to hatch their chicks in the next few days. She'd have them to show to her father when he came back. She attended to her stoep plants, saw to the two garden boys, and called for her pony.

She rode over the veld for three hours, checking the fences, seeing that the gates were closed, and talking to the herd boys. The day passed quickly, but there would be six more at least.

In the evening she thought of her father—he would have camped by now, and would be sitting smoking by the fire with a drink in his hand. The boys would be opposite him. There would be the sound of the knee-haltered horses cropping grass and hobbling about nearby. She knew he would be thinking of her and the cattle he was fetching, and what they would do when it was over. "We're going to sell off all the stock that's left here, close this house for a year and travel," he'd said.

It was hot. She hoped there would be no storm. She hated to think of her father caught in a summer storm with only a buck sail thrown over the cart to protect him from the rain. She went to the gun rack, took down her Mauser, loaded the magazine, and laid the rifle on the table behind her.

She was not nervous, but she felt better with a loaded rifle beside her. She was a first-class shot, though she had never shot anything alive. There was a .32 revolver in her bedroom, but she did not like pistols. They frightened her.

The next two days passed uneventfully. Barbara was delighted with herself. But today was different. The dogs never left her. Whatever she did, there they were, one on either side of her, pushing their cold wet noses into her hand. When she sat down, the dogs sat too, with their heads on her knee, staring up at her. And yet there was nothing to worry about. Everything was normal, everything was fine.

She had not even been as bored as she had expected. There were the new books that had arrived a month ago and had not been unpacked. She put a record on the phonograph.

Old Jim had pottered about, hovering over her as if he'd been her mother. Good old Jim, who'd been working for her dad before she was born. Sometimes he talked to her about the old missus and how wonderful she had been. Sometimes he talked about the wild game that had roamed here when her father had taken up the farm. Elephants, giraffes, lions, and now there was not a lion within two hundred miles. "Ja," he said, "you'd have to go to the Pan if you wanted to see a lion."

"I've seen them there," Barbara said. "It's a reserve, and everything there is the way it used to be."

"Ja," the old man said. "Ja, the same, but it's not the same. Where there were ten, now there is one, and they cannot trek. They are not free. When the old baas and I were young, the world was beautiful. Everything was free, the men and the beasts, and there were no police." He pointed a gnarled finger at her. "It is they, the police, who spoil everything. If there were no police, you could give an old Kaffir a little brandy to warm his heart."

It was a crime to give a native brandy. She laughed and gave him a tot. The old man clapped his hands and laughed. "You see, missus," he cried, "you look over your shoulder before you give me a little tot. The police," he said. "Ja, they'd throw my missus into the tronk for giving an old man a drink because he is black."

"No, Jim," Barbara said, laughing at him. "You were sick. Your heart was cold."

"Ja, missus," Jim said. "And can I be sick tomorrow evening too?"

But now that he had left her she was uneasy. She picked up the rifle, pulled back the bolt, and shot a cartridge into the breech. Then she put up the safety-catch. Now there was a round in the chamber. If she wanted to use it, there would be no sound from the action, hardly even a click as she pushed down the safety-catch.

The dogs, who knew about guns, were sitting at her feet, staring up at her. How silly I am, she thought. That's what I am—silly. Then she blushed. How right her father had been. A man, a couple of kids clinging to her skirts, "at foot," as Dad said. "A couple of kids at foot." How like him. She laughed out loud, and the dogs thumped the floor with their tails.

She gave a last look round the room and then, taking the lamp from the table, went to her bedroom. They never locked the house, and she wasn't going to do so now, just because she was alone. But before she got into her bed she went back for the Mauser and stood it against the wall, near to her hand. She could not remember when she had been more nervous.

"It's you—you're causing it," she said to the dogs. They just stood, looking at her with golden eyes, wagging their tails slowly to and fro. It wasn't a happy wagging.

They are just trying to give me confidence, reminding me that they are here and will take care of me, she thought.

She got into bed and began to read, but she still felt uneasy. Even while she read, she felt something was wrong. At first

she could not make out what it was, and then she realised it was the dogs. Generally, as soon as she settled down, they flopped on their sides and went to sleep. But not tonight. Bodo was standing with pricked ears, staring out of the window. Bismarck lay stretched out, his nose on his forelegs, his ears pricked, watching his brother.

"What is it?" she said.

The dogs looked round at her, wagged their tails confidently, and stared out of the window.

Barbara got up, patted the dogs, and returned to her book. She was still wide awake at one o'clock; so were the dogs. But they had relieved each other. Now Bismarck was watching the window and Bodo lay wide awake with his head on his forepaws.

It must have been two o'clock before Barbara dozed off. She woke twice, and in the moonlight saw the dogs still watching. It's the moon, she thought. It affects people and dogs. Dogs howl. But the dogs hadn't howled, and the moon had never affected her before except to make her feel romantic.

It would soon be light now, and Jim was always in the kitchen before the sun was up. She'd call for a cup of tea as soon as she heard him rattling about. That was something no one had ever been able to teach him.

"If I am quiet, how will anyone know what a good boy I am and how early I come to work?" he said. The truth was that he came early because he wanted his cup of tea. And he made a noise because he loved a noise.

Barbara looked at the dogs. "You silly things," she said and went to sleep again. Jim would wake her; she always heard him.

When she woke it was nine o'clock. Both dogs had their feet on the bed and were poking at her with their cold noses.

Where was the tea? What could have happened to Jim? She jumped out of bed and put on her dressing-gown and ran a comb through her hair. Not a sound came from the kitchen. Jim had not been in. The fire was not lighted. The lamp was still on the table.

She let the dogs out of the back door and looked towards Jim's rondavel. The dogs had reached it and were acting strangely, sniffing the ground with their hackles raised, and growling. Something was wrong. When she got close, she saw Jim's door was open. The dogs were standing at the threshold.

They went in with her, growling, furious, with their ears laid back and their tails out straight. Jim was not on the bed, but he had slept in it—there was the mark of his body. His red blanket lay on the floor where it had fallen. There was a queer smell in

the hut, a strong tomcat-like smell, the smell of a circus or a zoo. That was what was upsetting the dogs. She had never seen them in such a state. They were almost in a frenzy. An idea was forming in her mind.

Ridiculous, impossible; still, what else could have happened? I must be going mad, she thought, as she stepped out into the bright sunshine that almost blinded her after the cool darkness of the hut. And then she saw it.

In the freshly-hoed soil of Jim's little garden was the spoor of a lion and the drag marks of a body where the lion had carried it through the mealies.

The dogs were running forward, yelping with their noses down. So that was why they had been so uneasy all night. But how quiet the lion had been! It was a big one. The spoor was unmistakable. Her father had shown her lion spoor when he had taken her to the Etosha Pan. It was like a big cat's spoor. That was what a lion was—a giant cat, to whom a man was no more than a mouse.

Barbara felt herself trembling. Her knees were weak beneath her. She poked at the lion spoor with a bare toe, as if this would make it go away. It was impossible that she should be standing on a lion spoor that was not more than three or four hours old. There was no dew in it. Little paper-thin walls of red soil stood up between the toes where the lion's feet had sunk into the freshly cultivated soil. Why only yesterday she had seen Jim working in his garden. He grew his tobacco here, and marakas, mealies, Kaffir beans, and pumpkins.

It's no good panicking, Barbara thought as she called the dogs back and rubbed the tears from her eyes. Jim, dear old Jim, whom she loved almost as much as her father. Jim, with a tot of brandy last night and his talk of lions.. "The nearest lion two hundred miles away." That's what we thought.

She began to plan as her father had taught her. First, Jim was dead. There was no doubt about that. Unless you got a man away from a lion at once, made him drop him, the way you could make a cat drop a mouse, he had no chance. So there was no immediate hurry.

She dressed slowly, putting on khaki trousers and a bush jacket. One thing was clear. The lion was a maneater and had to be killed.

She would get out the car and drive to the dorp for help. She would tell the police and see if she could get anyone to come back with her. But who was there to come? The two police constables were town boys and had only service rifles. Actually, when you got down to it—though a lot of men talked very big about their

exploits—very few of them would be ready to tackle a maneater.

She knew what they would say.

"My wife won't let me."

"I can't get away today."

"If only I were a few years younger."

There was only one answer. She would go after the lion herself. If you want a thing well done, you've got to do it yourself, she thought. Dad always said that and, as usual, he was right.

He'll drink and lie up somewhere, she thought. For, although there had been no lions at Sandsluit since her babyhood, she knew a lot about their habits. There is always talk of lions in Africa.

Picking up her rifle, Barbara went out and rang the big bell that hung on a wooden gallows by the back door. It was only rung in emergency, such as a veld fire. The first strokes had hardly gone echoing over the farm before she saw men run towards the house. The Bartons had good boys. They paid, fed, and treated them well. In ten minutes they were all assembled, with a sprinkling of brightly-dressed, curious women and naked children behind them.

"Come," she said, and she led them to Jim's hut.

For a moment they were silent, thunderstruck. Then they went mad, shouting, "Leeu . . . Leeu," and pointing to the spoor. Barbara let them shout and chatter. Then she held up her hand.

"Jim was my boy," she said. "He was my friend. My father's friend. I am going after him."

"Wait for the baas," the head boy said. Amos was a grizzled veteran of sixty or more.

"I'm going now," Barbara said, "and I want you all to come with me. Bring tin cans and sticks to beat them with; bring drums; bring all your dogs and your spears."

"The missus knows we are not allowed assagais," Amos said.

"Bring spears," Barbara said. "The missus knows you have them hidden in the thatch of your huts." The men laughed.

Half an hour later they were assembled again. Twenty-one men with spears, bows and arrows, axes, and knives. The boys, carrying tom-toms and four-gallon paraffin cans, were already beating them with sticks. They did shuffling dance steps. A pack of yellow Kaffir mongrels accompanied their masters.

"Amos," Barbara said, "pick the best trackers and set them on the spoor."

He called two men. They were natural hunters, who had discarded their farm clothes. They wore only loincloths, and carried bows and arrows. What civilisation they had acquired

had fallen from them as leaves fall from a tree. This was the Africa her father had always told her about. Everything else was superficial, meaningless. Even I, she thought, feel different.

The rank smell of the lion had excited her. She must avenge Jim. New emotions overwhelmed her. It was not just the boys. It only took something like this to trigger a civilised woman. In an hour she had grown up on the one hand, and dropped back a couple of thousand years in time on the other.

There was no difficulty in following the spoor in the sandy soil. To start with, the lion had carried Jim, dragging him between his forelegs. Then he seemed to have thrown him over his shoulder. There was the terrible moment when they came to an ant heap, where the lion had paused to make a meal. Two pied crows rose from a nearby tree as they approached. The lion had stopped to drink at the hot springs that bubbled out of the ground a mile farther on.

"Now he will sleep," Amos said. "It is in my heart that he will be resting there." He pointed to a patch of bush three hundred yards away. "Why should he go farther? There he has shelter, shade, and is near water."

The track led them to the island of bush, which consisted of stunted palms and thorns. The hunters sat down. The trackers circled the patch. No lion spoor came out of it. "He is in there," they said.

The party had come with the wind behind them, so even if they had been quiet, there would have been no chance of surprising the lion.

Barbara called Amos. "This is my plan. I am going to stand behind that ant heap." The ant heaps in the south-west are taller than a man, and stand up like fingers out of the veld. "When I go," Barbara said, "you will make a great noise here. Beat on the drums. Send in the dogs so that the lion does not look my way. Once you see I am in position, send some of your men round the bush, on either side. Lead the others and the drummers through it, setting fire to it as you advance. My dogs you will hold," she said, putting them on their chains.

Barbara walked away slowly from the boys, reaching the ant heap by a wide detour. It was unlikely that the lion had seen her, considering the row her boys were kicking up. Once in position, he would not be able to scent her unless the wind changed. He would not be able to see her standing behind the ant heap.

Amos knew she had arrived. She could see the boys setting the veld on fire with torches made of grass that they had cut. The dogs, urged on by their masters, were barking hysterically.

The boys redoubled their shouts. The drums and tin cans were beaten even more furiously. No animal could stand that noise. The fire was creeping into the bush. The wind swept the smoke through it. She saw the boys' spear blades flash in the sun as they advanced behind the flames, and then the lion broke cover.

There was something magnificent in the way he came out, lashing his tail in anger. He stopped once and, lowering his head, roared with fury. Barbara saw his rib cage contract as he drew in his belly with each coughing roar.

I've never killed anything before, she thought. Then she thought of Jim and lost her fear. "I'll kill you," she muttered as the lion strode towards her.

This was the hard part—to remain steady, as still as a stone with a big, heavily-maned lion walking straight at you. She waited till he was twenty-five yards away. Then, resting the rifle against the ant heap, she fired.

She hit him in the chest at the point of the shoulder, knocking him down. He fell in a scurry of dust, roaring wildly, his eyes blazing. Barbara put two more bullets into him as he lay twitching in the dust. Her dogs flung themselves on him, with the Kaffir dogs following like a yellow blanket behind them.

Barbara sat down. I'm going to be sick, she thought. She had never fired three shots so fast before. The concussion had bruised her shoulder. The roaring screams of the lion had seemed deafening, and now the barking of the dogs and yelling of the boys were more than she could bear. There was still Jim to find. This was going to be the worst part.

Amos was beside her. "Come," she said. "Where is Jim?"

"I'll show the missus," he said. "It is not pretty. He is only half a man. Just the head and half of a man." Then he could contain himself no longer. He put his hand on her shoulder. "Aaaie," he said, "aaaie, we serve a woman who is better than a man. Our hearts are happy."

They had wrapped the remains in a blanket and lashed it to a pole. The lion, his feet tied together, was strung on another. The boys were just getting ready to pick up their burdens when Barbara heard someone say, "Who killed the lion?"

"I did," she said, turning round to face a man in a khaki uniform and a wide-brimmed brown felt hat. He had a rifle over his arm. "A ranger?" she said.

"Carl Brammer of Namutoni," he said.

"Then what are you doing here?" she asked.

"Following that maneater. I've been after him for ten days. He's killed four people."

"He killed my house boy last night," Barbara said. She looked at the long burden lashed to a sapling that two boys had on their shoulders. "He was my friend," she said. "He brought me up." Sobs suddenly racked her. The responsibility was over, was done with. There was a man to take over now.

"I'll take you home," the man said. "My jeep is a little distance back." His arm went round her as she clung to him. "I'll take you home," he said again, "and do you think I could have a bath?"

"A bath?" Barbara said, looking up at him with brimming eyes.

"I've not even had a proper wash for ten days," he said.

"Lovely," Barbara said, "lovely." She didn't really know what was lovely. "You must wait to see Dad, Mr. Brammer," she said. "I am afraid to be alone now."

"I'll wait," he said. "I have a report to make out. There's nothing to fear now, and you won't be alone any more."

As she followed him to the jeep, Barbara wondered what he had meant by that.

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★ ★ ★

STEAL A MARCH

March hath stole three days from April—or is it the other way round? Putting aside this vexed question, can you provide the answers to our March miscellany? Solutions, if hard-pressed, are on page 110

1. *March 15, the Ides, was a bad day for J.C.—but do other months have Ides? Which, if so?*
2. *Why "mad as a March hare"?*
3. *Marchpane, March Brown, can you identify?*
4. *To march in the rear of whereas—what does this mean?*
5. *What are marches—and we don't mean Sousa's?*
6. *Who wrote:*
   - *a. "Dirty British coaster with a salt-caked smoke stack*
     Butting through the Channel in the mad March days."
   - *b. "'Who touches a hair of yon grey head*
     Dies like a dog! March on!' he said."
   - *c. "Marching along, fifty score strong,*
     Great-hearted gentlemen, singing this song."
7. *Who marched his men up and down an adjacent eminence?*
8. *Who composed: a. Pomp and Circumstance; b. Dead March in Saul; c. La Marche Militaire; d. The Washington Post.*

Swan Song

And then she turned homeward, with one star awake,
As the swan of the evening moves over the lake.

She Moved Through the Fair

. . . Marvelling we found the swans,
The swans on sullen, swollen dykes afloat
Or moored on tussocks, a full company there,
White breasts and necks, advance and poise and stir
Filling the scene, while rays of steel and bronze
From the far dying sun touched the dead reeds.

So easy was the manner of each one,
So sure and wise the course of all their needs,
So free their unity in that level sun
And floodland tipped with sedge and osiery,
It might have been where man was yet to be,
Some mere where none but swans were ever kings,
Where gulls might hunt, a wild flight in from sea
And page-like small birds come; all innocent wings.

EDMUND BLUNDEN, *A Prospect of Swans*

Birds of Omen

Then on a mellow day towards the end of the year, when the air was soft and warm as spring and the water smooth as glass, four swans came swimming from some hidden sanctuary in the islands. Fionula stood with Hugh at the brow of their hilly land and together they watched them gliding like four white-sailed yachts over the shining water.

"Four!" she cried triumphantly. "All this time only two, but now four! Padraig and Eamon will surely be coming back to us now!"

Hugh looked at his sister's radiant face, and his own was sad.

"We cannot believe that, *agra*," he said. "They are but four swans. How can Padraig and Eamon be coming home?"

The strands of her red hair blew about her face, veiling her

eyes, but he saw the tightening of her mouth, the stubborn lift of her head.

"They will come," she insisted.

Hugh thought no more about it . . . But Fionula continued to watch the swans and to believe.

And a few days before Christmas, without warning, Padraig and Eamon walked into the kitchen, dark in their priestly black clothes, but their faces shining.

Fionula stared a moment, uttered a cry of joy, and ran to them.

"I knew you would come!" she cried.

ETHEL MANNIN, *The Wild Swans*

Leda and the Swan

A sudden blow: the great wings beating still
Above the staggering girl, her thighs caressed
By the dark webs; her nape caught in his bill,
He holds her helpless breast upon his breast.

How can those terrified vague fingers push
The feathered glory from her loosening thighs?
And how can body, laid in that white rush,
But feel the strange heart beating where it lies?

A shudder in the loins engenders there
The broken wall, the burning roof and tower
And Agamemnon dead.

Being so caught up,
So mastered by the brute blood of the air,
Did she put on his knowledge with his power
Before the indifferent beak could let her drop?

W. B. YEATS

Pride of Swans

When the five Whoopers were thirty yards off every head was raised as the Bewicks clustered together, unsure whether to accept or resent the approach of strangers.

Kloo kloo.

KLOO.

The leader stood off and fronted them, nodding its head half nervously as it began an uncouth parley. Hompur ignored the greeting. Now, as the distance between them lessened, the whole squadron of Bewicks began to call him in question, their voices softly melodious, curiously emasculate . . .

Kloong. He chimed gently as much as to say "Peace," and without more ado they all mingled together in a common herd. Why squabble when there was enough and to spare?

W. K. RICHMOND, *Saga of Swans*

The silver swan, who living had no note,
When death approach'd unlockt her silent throat;
Leaning her breast against the reedy shore,
Thus sung her first and last, and sung no more:
Farewell all joys, O death come close mine eyes,
More geese than swans now live, more fools than wise.

PO CHÜ-I

Musical Notes

When I played back the results of a series of night recordings, I came to the conclusion that the vocal performances and movements of swans during the breeding season, before the arrival of the cygnets, are not so limited as the casual observer might believe. There are sounds easy to identify; the clumsy but very rhythmical stepping in and out of the water: wing-flapping: landing in water: taking off: and the unique flight with its strong and powerful vibratory rhythm which so impressed Wagner that, as his wife Cosima told me, it may very likely have inspired him in writing "The Ride of the Valkyries."

LUDWIG KOCH, *Memoirs of a Birdman*

THE SMALL BALCONY

As she leaned there on her railing —
life waited for her in the darkness below

BY RONA JAFFE

IN NEW YORK CITY a thirty-year-old woman named Evelyn Perry lived alone in a two-and-a-half-room flat in a reconverted house in the East Sixties. She was pleasant looking, with brown hair, hazel eyes, pale skin, and the kind of forgettable face that women often have when they have no discernible defects.

She had come to New York eight years before from Omaha, Nebraska, where she still had parents and a younger sister who was married to a court stenographer.

For the first four years of her residence in New York, Evelyn Perry had shared a flat with two other girls; not the same two girls but a procession of them, who left to marry, to go home, or to live alone.

She was employed as a secretary in the advertising department of a home-furnishings magazine, and finally, when she could afford it, she decided to get her own flat. Solitary living seemed a more normal life, particularly since the supply of roommates was beginning to come from more and more casual sources, such as the friend of a friend; the last roommate had moved on with most of Evelyn Perry's clothes in her suitcases.

The first year of living by herself was a new pleasure; the cleanliness, the quiet, the independence, the acquisition of pretty things that belonged to no one else. *My* red casserole, to cook *my* chicken rosemary, for *my* supper. But it was a phase of delight that gradually paled. The second step was entertaining friends. After a year this too lost its glittering bridal quality since she had few friends, and eventually it seemed more like dredging up the nightly nourishment for the family than like giving a party. It was a Cinderella family that vanished at midnight.

Often, as she approached thirty, it occurred to Evelyn Perry that her couch, which converted into a double bed with a single pillow at the centre of the headboard, was less a sign of solitary

luxury than a marker of defeat. It did not mean that she was celibate; it simply meant that this bed was not a place where two people slept together at night. Love was investigation, search, indiscretion, stimulation, or even, occasionally, embarrassing boredom, but never what she wanted it to be. All the years passed as one, divided only by the seasons and names of semi-annual lovers.

More and more, during the winter of her eighth career year in New York, she felt she was drawing into herself—waiting, hovering, as self-contained and blind as a flower wrapped in its bud. Around her was quiet, loneliness, and within was a rage of colour and life that was hardly aware of its own existence. That other life erupted in dreams which were forgotten in the morning, their colours trailing off into fragments like one petal left on the bedclothes.

Evelyn Perry rode the Lexington Avenue bus reading the morning papers, she ate lunch in the restaurant in her office building, and at night she stopped at a grocer's to buy her supper. On Saturdays and Sundays, she cleaned her flat quietly, painstakingly, picking a dead match out of a clean ashtray, folding the bath towels on their rack so all the edges were tucked inside.

On Sunday mornings, she closed up her convertible bed and arranged the cushions neatly upon it; on Sunday nights, she opened it again, unseen by anyone but herself all through the day, and went to sleep. This life was not restful; she burnt from within, but she looked pale, and she was not pretty. This burning within the soul does not make a princess of anyone, despite romantic notions to the contrary; the eyes grow dull from gazing inward at the holocaust.

On the long quiet evenings during the week, Evelyn Perry's favourite place had become, for a peculiar reason, her kitchen. The kitchen of this flat, like the kitchens of many New York flats, was so tiny and cramped that in order to make it bearable she had installed a device to deceive and please the eye: trompe-l'œil wallpaper on the far wall, depicting a scene as if viewed from a small balcony. Working on a home-furnishings magazine, she had been able to buy the paper wholesale; it was very expensive and the view almost looked real.

The scene was the curving beach and varicoloured sea of Copacabana Beach in Rio de Janeiro. In the distance were misty purple mountains. Closer up were white, modern buildings in a row along the curve of pale sand. To complete the illusion of space and air, she had hired a carpenter to make a shelf jutting inwards from the printed railing, as if it were a little table on the balcony, and she could sit at this shelf or table and

dine facing the sea. It was such a realistic and refreshing scene that one never got the impression one was merely sitting like a punished child facing the wall.

The one detail the artist had forgotten was people. It was a beach without inhabitants, a Robinson Crusoe beach in the middle of a busy resort city. But it was easy enough to imagine in the mornings while she drank her coffee before rushing off to work that it was still too early for anyone to come to the beach, and at night she could pretend it was too late.

She pretended that she lived in one of those white, tall houses, perhaps on a low floor where she was closer to the brightness of life, and this was her balcony and each morning was the start of her day in Rio. She would be working in a little office somewhere, and at weekends she would swim and lie in the sun. She would not be lonely because there would be many foreigners in the city and they would all speak to her, being as lonely as she was. There would be ardent Latin men.

She had read a few articles about Brazil in fashion magazines, and one day she bought an elementary Portuguese instruction book because it seemed to open up that world a little more. She studied the book instead of her newspapers on the bus in a desultory manner. Then at night she would sit in her kitchenette with the ceiling-light off, one lamp lighted in the living-room at her back, and she would gaze down at that beach and sea, all silvered in the moonlight.

Everything was still. The surf at the edge of the white sand was white, too, and lifted in the air like blown lace. There were little lights glittering in the buildings. She wondered if people were having parties there in those lighted rooms. Below, on the sand, she saw small shapes that might have been lovers wandering there by the edge of the ocean under the stars.

At night the world had its own mysterious life: fish swam in the sea, invisible but living, and people moved in those dark, hidden streets, hand in hand. Life waited for her in the darkness. Looking down from her balcony, Evelyn Perry felt her scalp prickle; at the roots of her hair there was a chill that spread through her whole body. She felt a terrible poignance as she leaned there on her railing under the sky, as insignificant as anyone who had ever stared out at night at the curve of the universe. Hours passed at times, and she did not move, watching the lovers on the sand and the great world above them; and when she went to bed she slept immediately and deeply.

At the office during the day, she was quiet. She had never liked her job; it was boring, and she had been at the same desk

for eight years. She could do most of her typing without thinking. Some days she folded circulars and put them into envelopes. In the evenings she came directly home from the office in the winter's early darkness to the summer beneath her balcony.

There was a certain couple who came to the beach often at night, sometimes twice a week. They arrived separately at a designated place below, met furtively, and did not stay more than an hour. The woman was well-dressed and lovely, the man tall and strong, and their encounters passionate.

She wondered sometimes if it were her right to watch something so personal, lurking there jealously in the semi-darkness. Was there not something obscene, something both pathetic and vile, about a Peeping Tom? But what about exhibitionists? If people paraded their passions on the beach they could not expect privacy, even in the moonlight. For the first time the enormity of her loneliness overwhelmed her, and she clenched her fists against her eyes, shuddering, and wept without tears. Useless and lonely, lonely, lonely . . . dulled with uselessness and habit, waiting without anticipation.

When she looked down again, the couple on the beach were arguing, standing face to face in the awkward, stubborn postures of people who are shouting at one another. She watched them dully, wondering why lovers were stupid enough to fight. How ugly they were, braced in anger!

The woman turned away and began to run, and the man followed her, stopping her with both his arms. The woman twisted away and struck him, and then he strangled her. It was as simple as that. His hands joined round her neck, he stiffened, she struggled and then was still. He laid her on the sand as gently as if she were asleep, looked down at her for a long moment as with surprise, and began to cry. Then he fled into the darkness.

Staring after him, Evelyn Perry wondered with horror if the tide would come up and take the woman's body into the sea. She felt ill. She rose and went away from the scene quickly, dazed, into her own warm flat, into her own quiet life; but she could not make the image of the murder leave the back of her eyes, and that night for the first time Evelyn Perry did not sleep at all.

The next day was Saturday so she did not go to the office. Preparing her eggs and toast in the morning, Evelyn Perry avoided looking at her wallpaper, but then when she unavoidably had to glance it seemed so artificial and harmless that she had to smile. This was New York, not Rio; the eye could be deceived

by the mind, but the mind could be made impervious to its own horrors.

For the first time in weeks, she would go shopping, she would get out of the house. But she was taken with torpor, and as the day went by she found many tiresome things that had to be done before she could leave; it was important to wipe out the shards of soap from the soapdish in the bathroom, for instance. When she was dressed and all the vacuuming had been done, it was four o'clock, too late to begin an expedition in the shops because the salesgirls would be tired and nasty, the customers pushing anxiously to get home with their bundles. She had not even gone out for the newspapers; it seemed too difficult an effort.

She felt detached. The petty blown-up scandals and exposés of the newspapers bored her, they seemed so temporary to anyone who was not involved. Dusk came early.

It was pleasant to eat supper on her balcony, watching the lights come on in the buildings along the beach. She resented the thought that the telephone might ring, that anyone might call her away from this hour of privacy before the night. But the telephone never rang on weekend evenings; she was safe.

She wondered what had happened to the body of the strangled woman during the day. If a child playing on the beach had discovered it, the child might be emotionally scarred for life. She wondered whether the dead woman had children of her own. Had she been a married woman to be so furtive or had it been her lover who was married?

Gazing down at the spot where the lovers had quarrelled, Evelyn Perry saw a man walking along the beach very slowly with his head lowered. He stopped where the body had lain and suddenly threw himself down full length on the sand, lying there on his face as if he were dead. Then she saw that he was crying. He lay there for a long time until the sky became completely dark. Then he stood up painfully, wiped his face with a handkerchief, and went away. So two men had loved her, Evelyn Perry thought.

She wondered who this other man was. Not the father; he seemed too young. Not a brother; could grief so intense and intimate be for a relative? He must have been the husband, the cornudo, who had lost his wife long before that tragic night. Perhaps, if he had known his wife had a lover, Evelyn Perry thought, he would have strangled her himself, and it would have been the lover who would be grieving tonight.

The beach seemed lonely without the lovers. There were other tiny dark shapes in the distance but they did not matter; they were strangers. She did not want to look any more, and

that night when she went to bed she found herself weeping on her pillow for a dead woman she had never actually known.

On Sunday afternoon, just before sunset in summertime Rio, when it was already dark in winter-bound New York, Evelyn Perry saw two policemen in khaki uniforms escorting the widowed husband back to the scene of the crime. They were pulling him and he was protesting, trying to get away. He was handcuffed to one of them.

The poor man, she thought, first the other thing, now this. It isn't fair. But what was fair? It seemed enormously fair that life should be so unjust, that the wrong person should always suffer for the wrong crime instead of the one he had committed. Those guilty of omission shall be punished, those guilty of commission shall go free.

As soon as she had thought this, she was immediately ashamed of herself. It was not life that was unfeeling, it was people themselves. She was as much to blame as the next one. She was the witness to that crime on the beach, and if she spoke up the innocent man would be freed.

She ran into her living-room looking desperately for pencil and paper and her Portuguese instruction book with the dictionary in the back. She found a sheet of typing paper and brought the things to the kitchen.

Hurriedly, her hands shaking, she looked for the proper words. Lover . . . there was no word for lover in a foreign-language instruction book. *Senhor*, *senhora*, but never lover. She remembered her school Latin and applied it to Portuguese: *amante*. *O amante*.

There was not even any word for kill. Call the maid, there is a fly in my bedroom. But no word for kill the fly. Call a doctor. Call the police.

The lover did it. That was the closest she could come, so she printed the words on the large piece of white paper and with sticky tape attached it to her balcony railing so that it faced the beach.

It was too late; the policemen had already left, dragging the accused. Evelyn Perry had never felt so useless in her life. But the sign was there. She would leave it and perhaps tomorrow they would return, or perhaps someone else would see it and tell the police. The case would have to be a scandal, people would be talking about it, and someone would be sure to see her sign and tell the police. *O amante o cometeu.* They would know it was the lover who killed the woman; they would know.

The next day, Evelyn Perry did not go to the office. She wanted to go, she did not want to go; three times during the

night she leaned from her bed to push the bell-switch of her alarm clock, and later to pull it out again.

Her only excuse for irresponsibility was responsibility: she was not important at the office—someone else could stuff circulars into envelopes—but she might be important here. She had to admit she was curious. She could not help looking forward to daylight.

But then, when she was walking about her flat looking for things to do, bewildered by these hours of unplanned and unexpected leisure, she was not quite sure why she had stayed at home after all. The trompe-l'œil wallpaper in her kitchen was flat and painted, even though cleverly conceived; and the piece of white paper taped to the wall with the imprint of her writing faintly showing through from the other side so embarrassed her that, although she could not bear to tear it down, she did use this blank side to write her grocery list.

She napped fitfully on the bed turned back into a couch, and she told herself this day was therapy for an overtired mind. But she was so nervous by five o'clock that she got up to brew a pot of tea which she did not really want, and then let it get cold on the draining-board while she looked out at the beach and the slowly shadowing sky.

It was twilight, the true moment when the day is divided in two. Noon does not count as a division, nor does midnight; they are only hours of the clock. But twilight separates the lonely from the loved. The lonely leave their busy offices and go away from people, the loved finish their work and prepare to be with their families or sweethearts. Evelyn Perry, who had been one of the former, now found herself standing at her balcony after a day of leisure, watching the people below and wondering which of them was aimless, which hurrying. Finally the beach was empty. The bathers were gone, the lovers not yet arriving. She saw a tall man walking alone along the edge of the sea.

The man stopped near where the woman had been killed and looked around. He looked up then at Evelyn Perry standing lighted on her balcony, and she looked down at him. It was the lover, the murderer.

He glanced at her with disinterest, as one glances momentarily at any stranger on a balcony, and she saw that he had grown haggard and tense. He held himself warily, poised for flight, like an animal. One arm embraced a rifle in a curve so unfamiliar and graceless that she knew this rifle was the companion of the hunted, not the hunter. He looked about him in a crazed way, as if the mourning and waiting of the past three days had driven him out of his senses.

Then she felt sorry for him because he was as much a sacrifice as the murdered girl or the husband. He looked at her again, at her balcony rather, and she saw his face fully. She saw the look on his face gradually changing from curiosity to comprehension and then horror as he read the sign she had taped to her balcóny.

She did not feel afraid. He was so tiny, so far below, that she felt almost godlike in that moment on her balcony, right but regretful, huge, illumined, standing beside her handprinted message of doom. The rifle he held was only the size of a toothpick.

When he lifted it to his shoulder she felt surprised, even amused, more regretful than ever because he was so pathetic and small. She was frightened only when she felt the unexpected instant of overwhelming pain.

After Evelyn Perry had not been to her office all week and had not answered her telephone, someone called her landlady, who entered the unruffled flat and found the body. The landlady did not know the name of Evelyn Perry's doctor, so she called her own. Death had occurred on Monday evening between five and six o'clock.

The autopsy did not show the cause of death, but an autopsy never reveals barbiturate poisoning, which is usually suspected first in cases of this kind. Since there was neither a suicide note nor an empty bottle lying nearby, a chemical analysis was taken from the vital organs, but it did not show anything either.

No one ever really knew how Evelyn Perry died, but there did not seem to be any reason to imagine she had been killed. She was nobody's unwanted wife, nor was she carrying an unwanted child, nor was she anyone's unwanted mistress. She was certainly not the sort of person anyone would want very badly to get out of his life.

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THE TELEPHONE

Along the wire
Her voice,
Captured,
Almost caressed
In the cradle of his hand;
Her cadences,
Small birds,
Pecking at his ear
And crowding his smile
To laughter.

GRIFFITH WATKINS

GUN-HAPPY

There were two ways to catch a man in that wide open country

BY EDWARD LINDALL

ALEC BRAND left Nandi, his tracker, with the jeep and went up towards the house, along the path through the trim green buffalo lawns and the shade-splashed tamarisks, dusting himself with slow sweeping smacks of his hands. All his movements were unhurried. But his strong, angular young face was set, and there was guardedness, a sense of entrenchment, in his brown eyes as they watched the big white-haired man waiting for him on the verandah.

"So you got my message," Dan Fry said dryly, offering a calloused hand. "Thought maybe you'd forgotten where we lived."

"Been busy," Brand said evenly. "You know how it is." He touched palms briefly. "Give me the dope, Dan. This could be my man."

The man Constable Alec Brand sought was Manapuri, a myall from the Roper River country, three hundred miles to the north. He had speared two men to death in a tribal fight over women and headed south towards Brand's district, throwing off the pursuit on a trackless gibber plain. That was two weeks ago, and Brand had been waiting for him to show in his district for the past four days.

There were two ways of catching men in that wide open country of north Australia. You tracked them if you could, or waited for them to show. They had to show some time.

"Didn't get much of a look," Dan Fry said. "He didn't wait. Tall skinny feller with a beard. Naked except for a pair of shorts."

"Armed?"

"Two spears."

"Manapuri, right enough," Brand said.

"I still got my nose for trouble," Dan Fry grinned. And his broad face broke into cracks and wrinkles like the surface of a claypan in the sun.

Brand forced himself to return the grin, but it didn't deepen

the opacity of his eyes. They were defensive, letting him look out and nothing peer in. He hadn't wanted to come here to Dan Fry's homestead, but the message had been sketchy and there were details to fill in. He hadn't wanted to come because Dan Fry had been a cop for thirty years before retiring to this modest cattle run. He was also a friend.

Brand knew that if anyone in the district could guess the secret he was hiding deep within himself it would be ex-Sergeant Daniel Fry. Brand didn't want it fingered now or any other time. Fear, and the fear of fear, were not things you wanted known.

"Paula's in the house, if you're wonderin'," Dan Fry said mildly. "Fussin' with her hair most likely. We saw your dust way off."

"I was wondering," Brand said steadily, forcing the grin again.

He took off his broad-brimmed hat, banged it against his knee, and watched the red dust belch out around it. Paula Fry was another reason he hadn't wanted to call.

Paula was her father's housekeeper and companion. Her mother was long dead. There was nothing between them, nothing spoken, but Brand was always conscious of unspoken things when they were together. He felt awkward about meeting her now because he had avoided the Fry home for the past three weeks. He hadn't wanted to face her until he had resolved his problem . . . and resolved it right.

He returned to Manapuri. "He ducked into a boulder patch, you said?"

"The big one, you know."

Brand nodded. "Yesterday?"

"Late afternoon."

Well, this was it, Brand thought. The boulder patch was ten miles to the north-west, a great arid outcropping half a square mile in size. Perfect for an ambush, an ideal place for him to find out the truth about himself. The truth about the doubt that had been in him these past three weeks night and day, like a cactus thorn, festering until he knew only some drastic operation could bring relief.

The operation he had in mind was going in alone to capture Manapuri, without Nandi to scout or provide cover. He had decided on it days ago. He had to know whether he was sand or slush inside. He slapped the hat back on his head.

"Well thanks, Dan, for your help."

Dan Fry raised white, thorn-bush eyebrows. "What's your hurry?" He dropped a thick, square hand on Brand's forearm. "Stay for lunch. Paula will want to see you."

"Thanks, but no," Brand said, keeping his voice carefully

controlled. "There's a murderer out there. Sooner I pick him up the better."

"I've been a cop too, Alec," Dan Fry said quietly. He took his hand away. "This feller will stay hid. He won't be lookin' to spear anyone around here."

"Except the cop who's chasing him," Brand said curtly. And cursed himself as he saw Fry's blue eyes quicken.

"That's part of the joy of bein' a cop," Dan Fry said ironically.

"I'm not kicking," Brand said. "I just mention it."

He tried to keep his tone casual, unconcerned, but he knew his quick outburst had registered with Dan Fry. It had been an ordinary enough thing to say in ordinary times, he thought. But it had been stupid now. It had stoked suspicion in Dan Fry's mind. It was the sort of thing that could be expected from a jumpy cop, seeking to justify himself in advance for whatever he might do.

But at least, he thought dourly, it had told him that Dan Fry knew, or imagined he knew, what had happened on that day in town three weeks ago when Constable Alec Brand had panicked in his first real brush with danger.

On that day Constable Alec Brand, twenty-five years of age, tall and rangy, brown and strong, had been pacing from his one-man station house along the dirt-paved main street of Reinholt's Crossing on his way to buy some stores. He had been dressed, as now, in his uniform of khaki slacks and short-sleeved khaki shirt. On his head was a wide-brimmed hat, with a puggaree band on which shone the metal badge of the Northern Territory Police Force. He was the law in a ten thousand square mile bailiwick of cattle country, his first solo posting after four years of working the big towns.

Main Street had been empty, except for the bright yellow jeeps of some Yankee oil geologists. It was hot that day, as it was hot every day of the northern Australian summer. There was a brittleness, an abrasive quality in the air. It sandpapered and prickled all along his nerves. But he had himself in hand.

Or so he thought until he saw the old black sedan car pull in at the back of the drinking bar. It checked with everything. He went towards it, suddenly hard-tense, spring-taut, noting the cracked side-window, the one white-walled tyre, the broken left front bumper.

And then two men jumped from it, the dust spurting from their feet and the black shadows dropping, bent, across the earth . . .

Wanted for armed robbery . . . the bank at Calapurnie . . . the post office at Brewster's Gap.

The smaller man, a lean, red-shirted halfcaste, moved his hand across his chest. Brand dropped him with a bullet through the thigh before the gun had cleared his shirt, spun his white companion like a top with a slug that smashed a shoulder.

And Alec Brand stood in the white pulsating street, fighting to control the fear thàt writhed in him. Almost before the noise of the shots had died, men spilt out of buildings and he was being lauded for his courage and efficiency. Only he knew that he had gone for his gun in panic, before he had properly identified the men, without calling them . . . that he had been afraid.

"There's somethin' wrong?"

Brand heard Dan Fry's voice booming as in a dream. He blinked himself awake. "No," he said carefully. "Everything's all right."

"Well, let's eat," Dan Fry said. "We'll make it quick." He took Brand's elbow, pushing him towards the door. "Nandi's all right. Got pals in the men's cookhouse."

Paula Fry was in the kitchen. She was tall and slim, with dark red hair and deep blue eyes and a nature that went with both. Quiet and restful for the eyes; quick-tempered for the hair. She was somewhere in between when Alec Brand walked in holding his hat gingerly in one hand, but with all the rest of him—the strong jaw and cheekboned face, the wide shoulders and the deep brown eyes—held together with assumed composure.

"Paula," he said. "Hullo."

"Why, Alec," Paula said. "How nice." Her eyes looked calmly past him to the hat, then slowly back to him, raking him all along his length. "There's a peg behind the door. Remember?"

Brand used the peg, keeping his nonchalance in place. "You look fine."

"You're being rash," she said, and smiled mockingly. "You've changed."

The needle in the smile and in the words drove a tide of colour along Brand's neck, to spread and glow like a burnished sunset beneath the tanned darkness of his face.

"Paula," Dan Fry said, clattering two cans of beer. "Can you rustle up some lunch?"

"Father's missed you," Paula said. "He's been so worried."

"Been busy," Brand lied evenly. "On patrol out the other side of town. Water troubles."

"Why, of course," she said. "Big man. Big things."

Brand threw a quick, hard look at her, but she had turned away and was busy dragging food from a big white refrigerator and arranging it on the table. So he couldn't tell, or even guess,

whether her remark was loaded or was merely a tart reproof for his continued absence. All he could tell was that she was more lovely than he had known her before.

There was an emptiness in him now that craved her touch more than her friendship, and the same emptiness made it impossible. She was wearing a cotton dress, a sort of fawn, plain but for a russet belt that spanned her slender waist. It had short sleeves, and as she worked the long muscles moved beneath the golden skin, supple and flowing.

"You've heard about the shooting," he said flatly, unwillingly, but knowing he had to make some mention of it for the sake of naturalness.

She looked up briefly. "Word gets around."

"Yes, doesn't it," he said.

"You made quite a hero of yourself," she said, and her eyes stayed on him longer than they needed to.

"Your beer," Dan Fry said. "Drink it before it boils."

Brand crossed the room and perched on the hard edge of a chair. He took a long pull on the beer, appreciating the ice-cold bite of it against his teeth, the long slide down. But its pleasantness didn't compensate for what he had seen in Paula's eyes. Had she scented the taint that was in him, the sour acrid smell of fear? He looked up slowly, under the screws of tension.

In the background, leaning crosslegged against the sink, Dan Fry was watching closely. Pokerfaced.

"Paula," Brand said flatly. "If there's anything bothering you, out with it."

"Me?" Her voice was remote and cool. "Should something be bothering me?"

"Drop it," Dan Fry said curtly. "The man's on duty, not here for social chatter." He pushed himself upright. "Finish your beer, Alec, and we'll eat. Then we're free to move whenever you want."

"We?"

"I'm goin' too."

"No."

Brand slammed his beer glass down. His rejection exploded like a bomb hitched to a tripwire. He hadn't needed to think about it. Manapuri was his chance to prove that he could conquer fear, that he was no coward. He had no intention of having someone whittle the chance away.

"Don't be a young fool," Dan Fry said. "This man's dangerous. You can't handle him alone. Just you and Nandi."

"I can," Brand said flatly. "And I will. I'm not even taking Nandi."

Dan Fry pulled in a deep breath, held it, and at the bottom of its release said, " It's my land. I'm goin' along."

The calm assumption in his voice chafed Brand's already tight-stretched nerves. Dan Fry knew that he had been afraid in Reinholt's Crossing, and was now holding out a crutch to shore him up, offering to wet-nurse him. It was a measure of his friendship, but it was still intolerable.

" Show yourself within a mile of that area," Brand said harshly, " and I'll book you for obstruction."

Dan Fry considered him. Keen-eyed.

" You mean it? "

" You're damn right I mean it."

Paula came swiftly across the room, fists clenched and head thrown back. " How *dare* you talk like that to my father? "

Dan Fry flung up a hand. " Skip it, Paula. He's right. It's police business, and he's the cop."

" Gun-happy cop," Paula said bitterly. " He doesn't want a witness."

Brand felt the slap of that across the face, and then felt nothing. The blood drained away and left him numb. He swung round on her, noting the stains of anger in her cheeks. Her blue eyes were big and surface bright. The nostrils of her short straight nose were pinched. This was the red hair—the quick temper.

" What d'you mean? " His words were hoarse and whispered.

" It's what some of 'em are sayin'," Dan Fry said gruffly. " Now they've had time to think."

Brand's throat dried up. " Gun-happy? "

" They reckon you must've had a flyin' start in there at Reinholt's," Dan Fry said. " Two shots to none."

Brand felt a vacuum sense of unreality. Gun-happy! A killer! When all he had been conscious of was fear. But he couldn't tell them that. He stared back at Dan Fry, trying to measure him. The old cop's face was carved mahogany, the blue eyes motionless, unwinking.

" And you? " he said at last. " What d'you think? "

" I always thought you were scared," Dan Fry said levelly, entirely without emphasis. " First-time scared, like most of us have been." He paused. " Now I'm tryin' to make up my mind."

Brand didn't wait for more.

He jerked down his hat from behind the door, strode through the house, and stalked on stiltlegs to the men's cookhouse where Nandi was waiting with the jeep. The sun glare was brash against his eyes, the heat struck through his shirt, and near the stockyards the red dust, pounded fine by years of hoofs, puffed up knee-high with every stride. But he wasn't aware,

except mechanically, of anything happening outside him. Everything was unreal.

He had been flinching away from the knowledge that Dan Fry thought him nervous, jumpy, scared, when the chips were down. That Paula thought that of him, too. He hadn't dreamt that they, of all people, would have thought him gun-happy. But that's what Paula had thrown at him, and Dan stood silent letting the accusation lie . . . waiting to make up his mind. Gun-happy. Shoot first, ask questions afterwards. Was that what people were saying about him, in whispers, behind his back?

In the hundred yards he covered to the jeep an added weight of years pressed on his shoulders. He climbed behind the driving wheel. Dried up. Arid. He shook Nandi, sleeping in the passenger seat, untroubled by the buzz of flies about his wide black face.

"On our way," he said roughly. "Sit up and use your eyes."

But they saw nothing in their twisting progress through the low scrub except the things they should have seen: cattle dozing in the shade, a few kangaroos hopping drowsily away, and once, in a clearing, a flock of wedge-tail eagles tearing at a kill. Brand hated the eagles for their cruelty to maimed and wounded things. He had once come across a dozen of them chasing a lame kangaroo to death round a claypan, taking it in turns, one chasing, hitting the frightened animal with its wings, while the others rested in the trees.

He hated them for things like that, but recognised their usefulness. With their retinues of crows and hawks, they kept the country clean. They were also an aid in tracking, with their vile ability to detect the slightest movement on the ground. Near the boulders he expected them to give some sort of lead.

And they did. When the jeep burst from the scrub on to the sandy apron that circled the great boulder patch, isolating it like a great lumpy scar from the tree-clad plain, three eagles hung in the pale blue sky.

"He's in there right enough," Brand said bleakly. "About centre."

"More better we find tracks," Nandi said, beaming with pleasure in his mentor's role. "Mebbe it not Manapuri."

"O.K.," Brand said, "let's check."

They found the tracks some six hundred yards to the north, leading from the scrub into the boulders. They showed up clearly in the sand. There was no mistaking them. Nandi pointed to their signature, a twisted big toe on the right foot.

"Manapuri, orright, boss," he grinned.

Brand nodded. "Hasn't tried to double back or hide his tracks. Must be tired of running."

"Proper cunning feller, boss, I tink," Nandi said. "'E not tired. 'E sit down wait."

"Go on," Brand said.

Nandi brushed dust from his neat khaki shirt, ran a hand down one trousered leg, wriggled the elastic-sided riding-boots that encased his sockless feet. This was his moment. The moment of the expert with his young pupil.

"Tracks make long steps. Orright? Eagles tell truth, too. Many eagles when man sick. But only three up dere. All high. Dat feller not too much sick."

Brand nodded thoughtfully. "Guess you're right."

He peered round the nearest boulders: rough yellow sandstone, cracked and weathered by years of wind and rain and heat, the spaces between them bare of any growth and floored with coarse sand that would crunch noisily beneath his boots.

It was perfect ambush country and he was going in there alone after a man who was waiting for him. A tribesman with two lives already bled from his spears, and who had voluntarily stopped running. A man who was far from "too much sick." Brand reached for and slowly buckled on his pistol, turning back the holster flap and tucking it behind the belt.

A creeping fear began to flicker in him. He felt a sudden rush of sweat from underneath his arms. There was no comfort in the pistol. It was a dull weight tugging at his balance. A crouching menace at his side. It reminded him how he had lost control three weeks ago and gunned two men in panic. It brought back words to clatter in his head, words that hurt and demanded answers. "Gun-happy cop," Paula Fry had said. And Dan, "I'm tryin' to make up my mind."

Brand looked up again at the eagles, hanging on still wings, down at the wilderness of sandstone boulders shimmering in the heat, examining those words again, turning all the angles. And he knew he was merely marking time. His earlier determination to go in alone to prove his nerve was no longer enough. Now he needed two great answers. The second was for Paula Fry and the unknown people who had already judged him too ready with a gun.

He climbed out of the jeep into the broiling sun. For a moment he stood motionless, his young face hard and sculptured. Then he unbuckled the pistol and threw it in the jeep.

"Nandi," he said abruptly, "I want you to drive away a mile or so. I'll light a smoke signal when I want you to come back."

Nandi stared. His dark eyes shifted to the pistol. "You got

mad? You got sun-sick?" His voice broke and squeaked. "'E spear you f'sure."

"Maybe he'll come out and surrender when he sees I'm unarmed," Brand said. "Now you go. Stay away until you see my smoke."

"More better I sit here," Nandi said stubbornly.

"Get moving," Brand barked. "Now. That's an order."

He waited until the jeep was a far-off mutter through the scrub, then turned and walked steadily towards the first line of boulders. They closed behind him like a gate. Ten paces and there was nothing to be seen but the curved yellow walls rearing over and around him, the coarse yellow sand beneath his feet, and odd-shaped segments of remote thin sky. It was baking hot. Brand felt the sweat running down his chest and back, and soon his shirt began to stick.

He patrolled ahead, scanning both sides with careful eyes, turning his head with deliberate ease to suggest unconcern. He didn't have to search. Manapuri would come to him, silently as a shadow, follow him a while to size him up and then make a move.

The fear that Brand had felt earlier was still with him, but now he had a bridle on it. It wasn't riding him. He could feel it in an added tenseness in his stride, in a steel-spring readiness about his muscles. It felt good, not at all like that lightning flash of panic that had overwhelmed him at Reinholt's Crossing. He was poised for action, ready for it, and yet not fretting for it to start.

He knew the risks that he was taking, pitting himself unarmed against this man, but they remained in the background as solid reasons. They were both poison and antidote.

He reasoned there was one small thing in his favour. Manapuri had slain his victims rightfully according to tribal law, and would have no deep sense of guilt, only an awareness that he was being called to answer to a stupid white-man law. Thus he could well lack decision when the showdown came. If only for a second.

The first hour yielded nothing but the skitter of small lizards and the punishment of heat. Brand paused to rest a moment in the shadow of a boulder, where the labyrinth he had been treading came out on a small bare clearing. In the silence he fancied he could hear the after-echo of his crunching boots. And Paula Fry's tense voice, tense with her accusation, sounded distantly in his ears.

He wondered about her outburst then, the depth of bitterness that had made it so personal. As though the things men said about him had wounded her. A sense of disbelief stirred in him. A small excitement beat against his heart. Then he shook his

head sharply to dispel those thoughts. They had no place. The time to examine them was later; any time at all but now.

He looked round casually, certain that he was under observation. The ground birds that might have tipped him information were drowsing in bush hideaways. Only the lizards and the eagles braved the heat. He looked up and the eagles were still there, sailing the updraughts, gracefully sinister. Then his eyes slitted. They were lower. Something had attracted them.

A pulse quickened in his neck. The sweat-damp shirt was cold against his back. Then a pebble bounced on the ground in front of him, and rolled away. He flattened, instinctively, against the boulder, darting his eyes around. There was nothing. But the pebble had rolled away, which meant it had come from behind.

He stooped quickly, took off his boots, and scooped up a handful of small stones. He threw them in a shower across the boulder and slipped quickly round its side, keeping to the shadow, hoping to surprise his man. But they didn't meet face to face. Not then. The tribesman was padding, with the crouching stealth of a hunter, round the other way.

"Hey," Brand yelled. "You there."

Manapuri jumped sideways, twisting in the air like a cat, straightening from his crouch as soon as feet hit ground. The spear in his right hand was poised above the shoulder, his legs were spread, weight balanced on the back foot. The second spear, in the left hand, was held across his body. His thick lips, startlingly red amid the black beard, were drawn back in a snarl. His blazing eyes were sighted on Brand's chest.

"Me friend," Brand said, and held out his empty hands. "You come along me. Go walkabout."

Brand stood motionless for long seconds, hoping that his gesture, if not his words, would be understood. Twelve feet of barren, bushless earth were between him and the spearpoint. He felt dreadfully exposed. The fear that had been controlled so long threatened for an instant to take over. But he clamped down fiercely, knowing he must not waver now, moulding his face into impassivity, holding himself erect.

He even had control enough to admire the tribesman's superb physique. Sinew and muscle, with no spare flesh.

"Manapuri," Brand said steadily, "you come now."

He took a pace forward and the spear was raised a fraction. Brand knew then they had come to the moment of decision. Life and death were in the balance. A cold spiral of fear began to rise in him.

But then he saw something gleam in Manapuri's jet black

eyes. Something he recognised. His own eyes bored in and he realised, with an inward shock, that Manapuri was afraid. Armed with two spears, and he was afraid.

Brand took another forward step. And then he stopped. The black eyes tightened almost imperceptibly, and Brand knew instinctively what was coming. He leapt sideways, ducking as he went, and the spear ripped through his shirt at the shoulder, burning the skin.

He didn't pause, but lunged straight for his man. He butted him in the stomach, and the second spear was dropped. Then they were on the ground. He was sickened by the body stench as they rolled over, and he felt his hands slipping . . . greased with emu fat . . . the warrior's trick.

He brought his knee up violently in a warrior's trick of his own, heard a tortured gasp as it sank into the groin. He swung free then and, turning on his knees, smashed his right fist into the mat of beard, followed it with a left. And that was all. He kicked the second spear away as he regained his feet.

Panting, clutching for breath, he turned the limp body over and used his belt to lash the arms behind. He went back for his boots, staggering slightly, and dragged them on. And only then, when he had got everything secured, did he search himself for hurt. He was quickly reassured. The left shoulder was ripped and bleeding, but not badly.

He stood looking down at Manapuri for a while, getting his breath, letting the tension ease. And as the tension eased he began to feel a strange sympathy for the beaten man at his feet. This man who had never been inside four walls was heading for a ten- or fifteen-year prison stretch. But that wasn't it. Not altogether.

"So you got scared, too," Brand said softly. Then he grinned ruefully as he bent down. "Bad luck. I knew you were going to loose off on me then. Me, of all people. Of course I knew."

He staggered out from the boulders with Manapuri across his shoulders, one big hand holding a limp black arm and the other hand keeping up his trousers. The spear wound in his shoulder was paining with the movement, and the sweat of effort stung it, but his head was clear and high. He had been afraid and he had conquered the fear and made it work for him. He was afraid of fear no more. His nerves were sound and he had not used a gun. The word would get round.

He laid his prisoner gently on the ground in the thin shade of the scrub and stood back to flex his arms. "Manapuri," he said quietly. "Thanks."

Then he got his smoke-fire going to summon Nandi, and the

column had scarcely fingered up above the trees when he heard the jeep. It came roaring and bouncing through the scrub. He could see it only as a projectile, eccentric, frantic, and he wondered when Nandi had learnt to drive that way.

Then the jeep charged clear and swung towards him. And he saw Dan Fry was driving.

"You damn young fool," Dan Fry bellowed, as he skidded to a halt. He jumped out and bellowed it again. "You damn young fool." His big wide face was grim, but his eyes were soft, even a little moist. "Thank God your tracker's got some sense. Came lickety-split for me."

Brand frowned at Nandi, but not deeply, and Nandi dropped his head. Then he looked down at Manapuri, stirring a little with the noise. "I got him, didn't I?" And he added, "Without a gun."

"Yeah," Dan Fry said slowly. A deep red flush suffused his face, right up and into his white hair. He shook his head. "But never pull a stunt like that again, son. Never."

"I won't have to," Brand said. "From now on I can afford to tote a gun." He felt sure of himself, no longer inhibited by any twinge of shame. "I can tell you now, Dan," he said easily. "In Reinholt's I got scared. I pulled my gun too soon."

"And this time about an hour too late," Dan Fry said soberly. "I reckon you're more than square."

He looked carefully at the assured young man before him, at the sweat and the torn shirt with its stains of blood. "You better come back with me." He reached out a hand. "Let us clean you up a bit."

Brand heard contrition in the deep, gruff tones, could see it in the weathered face. He felt a warm response, but an uncertainty about Paula daunted him. "Maybe I'd better head for town," he said. "Get my prisoner in."

"You're the boss," Dan Fry said quietly. "But I got trouble." He sighed gustily. "I got a girl back there, tearin' her hair like crazy for speakin' out of turn."

Brand stood quite still for a moment, and the same small excitement he had known in the boulders began to beat once more against his heart. He slapped Dan Fry on the shoulder.

"Wonderful," he said, and grinned. "Let's go."

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GONE WEST

6-year-old to TV repairman: "I bet if you cleaned out the dead cowboys from the bottom of the set it would work again."

OUR MAN IN LLANGRWL

By E. L. MALPASS

THE thing that landed in Top Meadow was like nothing ever seen at Pen y Bont farm before. Big as a henhouse, all bright and shining. While inside—a cross between Regent's Park Zoo and Kew Gardens, Globe Trotter Thomas said it was. And Globe Trotter, who had been on two day-trips to London, ought to know.

One of those still autumn evenings it was, in the sixties, with the old summer dying and all nature gathered hushed and silent round the deathbed. A little cloud floated like a pennant from

the tip of Snowdon, and in the valleys the mist lay like folded linen. Not a sound anywhere. And then, suddenly—Wumph!

Galvanised they were, down at Pen y Bont.

"What was that?" cried Grandfather Watcyn, leaping up angrily from his chair and reaching for his sh tgun; for Grandfather believed in being angry first and finding out why afterwards.

"'Tis the Angel Gabriel landing, if you ask me," said Gran, who had been expecting Judgment Day for some years now. "Sounding off the Last Trump any moment he will be." She vacated her rocking-chair, and was out of the back door in no time, pausing only to snatch the Methodist Hymnal from off the harmonium. Not one to risk being debarred from the Heavenly Choir just because she'd forgotten her music, was Gran.

Grandfather was a close second; then Globe Trotter, his arm round the lovely Vanwy, her dark head very close to his black sidewhiskers; and little Ceri, excited as you please; all legging it for Top Meadow as fast as their legs would take them.

But when they reached Top Meadow, no Angel Gabriel. Only this thing, smooth and sinister in the gathering dusk. Only that, and a great hole in the fence where it had gone through.

"See that," roared Grandfather, pointing to the damaged fence. "Oh, suffer for that, they shall. No respect for property nowadays. No—" He broke off, stood with his head cocked, listening. "There is a dog barking."

Very devoted to dogs, Grandfather was. Didn't think much of humans, mind, but when it came to dogs he would go to any trouble. And they understood him and loved him. Which was more than most humans did.

He went on listening. Then he said in astonishment, "It is in that contraption," and he strode off through the tangled dew-drenched grass and stood gazing up at the thing.

Oh, but eerie it was, with that great object before them in the dusk and everyone silent and, near at hand yet somehow infinitely far, the persistent barking of a dog.

Vanwy pulled Globe Trotter Thomas' arm closer about her slim waist and shivered. Ceri, eyes big as saucers, clung to Gran's hand.

"In trouble, that creature is," said Grandfather. And he lifted his gun to smash a way into the thing.

But Globe Trotter said, "Let us see what turning this knob will do," and he turned the knob and a panel slid quickly open.

They all crowded round and peered with fascinated terror. And what did they see inside this object that had fallen so softly out of the evening sky? Little Martian gentlemen? Venusians,

beautiful in cloth of gold? Some monstrous, doggy voyager from Canis and the Dog Star?

No. They saw one very earthy mongrel, a small monkey, two tame rabbits, three white mice, and some trailing plants.

Jumping up and down, Ceri was. "Oh, there is pretty," she cried, her eyes on the rabbits and white mice. "Like Christmas, isn't it."

But Grandfather was looking at the dog. "Good with the sheep, I shouldn't wonder," he muttered.

And Gran put out her old hand, and lovingly she touched the trailing plants and held them so that their leaves were spread against her fingers. "Look pretty, growing round the W," she said thoughtfully.

Whitehall, London. Oh, there is a great thoroughfare for you. You could put all Dinas High Street in one little corner and not notice it. And the buildings! Bigger than Price's Emporium.

In an office in one of these buildings a telephone was ringing. A gentleman picked up the receiver. "Foreign Secretary here," he said.

"This is the Russian Ambassador," said the voice on the wire.

The Foreign Secretary's heart sank. "What is it, Ivan Ivanovitch?" he asked warily.

The Ambassador said, "Our latest satellite, the supreme achievement of Russian science, has returned to earth. We believe it has landed in the Principality of Wales."

"Indeed?" said the Foreign Secretary. Noncommittal, see.

"We want it back," said the Ambassador. "Immediately and intact."

The Foreign Secretary considered. "Wales is a big country, Ivan Ivanovitch."

"Not as big as Russia," said the Ambassador. He rang off.

The Foreign Secretary replaced the receiver. "Find satellite," he scribbled on his pad. He rang a bell. Mainwaring, his secretary entered. "You know that new Russian satellite," he said. "The one with the menagerie. It's come down in Wales. They want it back."

"If I might make a suggestion, sir. This is hardly a Foreign Office matter. Is it not rather a question for the Minister for Welsh Affairs?"

The Foreign Secretary looked at his subordinate with a blend of thankfulness and admiration. "Mainwaring," he said, "you are invaluable. Men have got the O.B.E. for less." He picked up the telephone. "Get me the Minister for Welsh Affairs," he

said. He waited. Then, " Hey, Taff. Foreign Secretary here. I've got a job for you."

" Carruthers," said the Minister for Welsh Affairs, a few minutes later, " I've got a job for you."

" Indeed, sir? " Carruthers clicked his well-polished heels. A keen type, eager and boyish.

The Minister looked at him sourly. " Won't be quite so keen when he's had a basinful of this lot," he said to himself. He outlined the problem. " So it's all yours," he concluded. " From now on East-West relations are in your hands."

Carruthers swallowed. " Very good, sir." He retired to his office, very thoughtful.

Well, there was a problem. Carruthers thought about Wales. The great sweep of Cardigan Bay, the Lleyn and the Gower, the awful wastes of Snowdonia, the green hills of Llangollen. And this satellite might be anywhere—half submerged on some boggy mountainside, nestling in some lush valley, bobbing about merrily off Llandudno pier. He sighed. Then he sent for all the Welsh telephone directories, opened the first one at POLICE, and set to work . . .

Four days later he was on his sixth directory and working steadily through the " Llans." " Get me Llangrwl 140," he said.

" Llangrwl Police," said a bass voice.

" I am speaking on behalf of the Minister for Welsh Affairs. Give me the Inspector."

" And what should we be wanting with an Inspector in Llangrwl? Not Scotland Yard, is it? "

" The Sergeant, then."

" Can't speak to *him*, can you now."

" Why not? "

There was a deep chuckle at the other end. " No telephone line to that old cemetery, see." He seemed to feel that some explanation was called for. " Died he did, last March. Very tragical."

" Then who is in charge? "

" Me," said the voice with simple pride.

" And who's me? "

" Constable Jenkins." Suddenly the voice became very official. " What is it, good boy? "

Carruthers outlined his problem. " You—haven't anything to report in that line? " he concluded.

Silence. Then, " Taking a long time to appoint a new Sergeant they are," Constable Jenkins said thoughtfully. " I suppose you would not be having any influence? "

" None whatever. But it's your duty—"

"Didn't say I'd seen anything, did I now."

Carruthers made up his mind. "I'm catching the next train to Llangrwl," he said firmly.

"Can't do that, good boy."

"Why not, in heaven's name."

"Line was closed in '47. Grass growing on the track now. Very desolate."

Bob Carruthers put down the receiver. He mopped his forehead. He reached for his rolled umbrella and his bowler.

Oh, happy they were that evening at Pen y Bont. The oil-lamp cast dancing shadows on the black-beamed ceiling, and the fire leapt in the great hearth, and the china dogs on the dresser winked merrily in the firelight. Grandfather sprawled in his big chair, sleepily pulling the ears of his new dog, who covered his knees like a travelling-rug. And at the table Ceri peered enchanted into the little cage Gran had found for the mice. Pretty they were, running up and down ladders, turning a little wheel, ringing a tinkling bell. And in a corner Vanwy and Globe Trotter, heads close together, were busy working the monkey into a pair of tiny scarlet jeans.

There was a hammering at the door. Gran, who had spent the day knocking up a trellis for her trailing plants and was weary, rose. She went and opened. A young man stood outside. "Bed and breakfast, is it?" she asked hopefully.

"Well, actually, I'm looking for Llangrwl," said the young man. "But I seem to have been misdirected. Perhaps—"

"Not having any damned hikers here," bellowed Grandfather.

"I'm not a hiker." Bob Carruthers sounded plaintive. He leaned heavily on his umbrella. He'd had enough. Train to Dinas Junction, then a bus to the middle of nowhere, then a five mile walk; with the darkness and the realisation that he must have taken the wrong road closing about him at just about the same time. Then he'd seen this light. And he suddenly knew that all he wanted was food and a bed.

"Oh, there is tired you are," Gran said kindly. "A glass of milk, is it; and some cold rook pie, and a soft bed under the eaves?"

It sounded like heaven. But the burden of East-West relations was still on his shoulders. "If I might just make a telephone call first," he said tentatively.

Grandfather looked at him balefully. "Telephone! What do you think this is? The Grand Hotel in Llandudno?"

"But I must ring up the Llangrwl police. Where *is* the nearest telephone?"

" Llangrwl," said Grandfather.

The young man sagged slightly at the knees. " How far is it? "

" Five miles as the crow flies. Seven by the road. And you are no crow, I am thinking."

" Better stay the night," said Gran, who was already laying the table. " Fifteen shillings bed and breakfast, supper extra, very reasonable. Grandfather will lend you his nightshirt."

Mr. Carruthers shuddered. " Thank you, I've got my pyjamas." But he was very worried. Conscientious to a fault, the thought of wasting perhaps twelve hours appalled him. " You couldn't—run me as far as the village? " he suggested.

" What in? " asked Grandfather.

Bob Carruthers gave up. He put down his briefcase and his bowler, propped his umbrella in the corner, and sat down to supper . . .

" Dinner is served, sir," announced the Prime Minister's butler. And at that moment the telephone rang.

The Prime Minister picked up the receiver. " That old so-and-so on the line," said the voice of his secretary. " All the way from Moscow. Steamed up proper he sounds, too."

" Oh, not that damned satellite again," muttered the P.M. " Tell 'em to keep it hot," he said to the butler. Then, into the telephone, " Prime Minister speaking—"

" Pretty, aren't they," little Ceri said when the supper things had been removed and her mice brought back on to the table.

" Yes, indeed," Bob Carruthers said kindly.

" Got rabbits, too, under the sink." She slipped her hand in his, led him across the big kitchen. The rabbits wrinkled their noses at him.

" Quite a menagerie," he said.

But the creature that interested him most was the monkey. Because above the monkey's head was another head: a sleek and lovely one with red lips and brown eyes that had regarded him with considerable interest as he ate his cold rook pie. So he strolled across the kitchen.

Vanwy looked up at him, her cherry lips parted demurely in a smile. In the yellow lamplight he looked at her, and thought her the most beautiful woman he had ever seen in his life. " Is it from London you are? " and her voice was as soft as a harp string brushed by the wind.

He nodded.

" Globe Trotter knows London like the back of his hand," she said, indicating her companion.

Globe Trotter flashed his white teeth. " Travelled all the

way from Morden to Cockfosters on the Underground Tube. There is a journey for you, very exhilarating."

"I should like to visit London," Vanwy sighed, very forlorn. "But it is no place for a young girl on her own, they say, and I do not know anyone there who would take care of me."

"I should be very happy indeed, Miss—er—" said Carruthers gallantly. And he meant it. Gad, this lovely creature would cause a riot in the West End.

She looked at her companion.

"Time you were going, isn't it, Globe Trotter. Don't want to miss the last bus, do you now?"

Sulky, Globe Trotter looked. "Plenty of time, isn't it," he said. He sat firm.

Vanwy ignored him. She looked up at Carruthers. Her eyelashes fluttered like young birds. "There is kind you are, Mr.— I don't know your name."

Carruthers beamed anxiously. With the international situation on the one hand and this radiant creature on the other, he felt the ground rushing from under his feet. "Call me Bob," he said.

She gave him a smile that started another landslide. "You can call me Vanwy," she cooed.

"Oh, call me Mr. Thomas," said Globe Trotter, proper disgusted. He crossed one leg over the other and sat hugging one pointed shoe and whistling *Cwm Rhondda* through his teeth. Settling down for the duration, Globe Trotter was . . .

But the next morning there was no Globe Trotter. Only the sun rollicking in through the window, and the sparrows fidgeting in the eaves, and the cows mooing in the far meadows, and that old Snowdon looking as though it had just come back from the cleaner's. Bob Carruthers awoke and thought of Vanwy, and the satellite, and the Minister for Welsh Affairs, in that order.

Sternly he decided to concentrate on the satellite. But there was a gentle tapping at his door. "Come in," he called. The door opened. Vanwy came in with a cup of tea.

The satellite went back to second place. It was a moot point, Bob decided, whether this girl looked lovelier in the soft lamplight or, as she was now, fresh and sparkling with the morning dew upon her. She sat down on the bed. "Taking me to London is it, today?" she asked quietly.

Drank his tea the wrong way, Mr. Carruthers did. Choked. Vanwy slapped him on the back, very solicitous. "I'm afraid— I've got some business to do here first," he said. "But if your grandparents *would* let you come up for the day—later—we—might have lunch or something."

"Oh, I did not mean for the day," Vanwy said cheerfully. "I meant for always."

Choked again, did Mr. Carruthers. Then he said, very fatherly, "I don't think it would be wise, a girl like you alone in London."

"But I should not *be* alone," she said. "You told me you would take care of me."

Funny creatures, men. There was that Carruthers, thinking Vanwy was the most beautiful and desirable woman he had ever met. And yet at this moment he would have run a mile if he could have got out of bed and into his trousers with decency. But he couldn't. So he said, "I thought you'd got a young man. You wouldn't want to leave him."

"For you," she said with simple dignity, "I would leave everything and everybody."

"Look, Vanwy," he said. "I don't think you quite understand. If you came to London with me we should have to get married."

"What is wrong with that, then?"

It was a good question. The answer was, of course, that Mr. Carruthers had come to the Principality to look for a satellite, not a wife. And, like most men, he did not like having his plans upset. "Marriage is a serious business."

"But there is serious *I* am," said Vanwy, demurely smoothing her frock. But her eyes were as merry as the sunlit, wind-ruffled waters of a pool.

The Prime Minister telephoned the Foreign Secretary. "Look, Basil. This satellite. The Russians are threatening to bring it up at the General Assembly."

The Foreign Secretary telephoned the Minister for Welsh Affairs. "Hullo, Taff. What news of your man in Llangrwl?"

"Haven't heard a word. I think he must be on to something." A born optimist, that one.

And Mr. Carruthers was certainly on to something. But it wasn't the satellite. As he strolled about the farm with Vanwy, their fingers interlaced, he no longer wanted to run a mile. Dash it, he'd marry the girl tomorrow.

He felt intoxicated. The morning was as bright as a new shilling. He took great gulps of the pure mountain air. He began to wonder whether Grandfather would give him a job on the farm.

They met Gran. "See my new plants," she said proudly.

"Very pretty," said Bob, who was no horticulturist, and was really looking at Vanwy. But then he saw something that

made him forget Gran and the new plants and even Vanwy. "What on earth is that?" he demanded.

"That? The water butt, of course," said Grandfather, appearing out of the cowshed, his gun under his arm. "But I suppose you are not having water butts in London. All out of taps, isn't it, very insanitary."

"It looks a most expensive one," said Mr. Carruthers. So it did, too, all smooth and shining.

"Oh, very expensive," agreed Grandfather, stroking his beard, gazing at the mountain peaks.

"May I ask where you got it, sir?"

For a second two very shrewd eyes looked at Mr. Carruthers Then the old gentleman resumed his study of the hills. "In Llangrwl market, where else?"

"Who sold it you?"

"Ikey Shand, the Secondhand."

In his excitement Mr. Carruthers seized Grandfather's arm. "Look," he said. "I must see this Mr. Shand. Do you—do you know what this thing is? It's the Russian satellite."

"Well, did you ever?" said Gran.

"I do not care what it *was*," said Grandfather. "But I know what it *is*. It is my water butt."

Bob Carruthers wasn't listening. "They put it into orbit," he began. "With white mice and a monkey and some plants and things—" He broke off. "Good lord. White mice! Plants!" He turned to his beloved. He took both her soft hands in his. "Vanwy," he pleaded, "where did you get that monkey?"

Vanwy lifted her clear, lovely eyes to gaze into his. "From my Auntie Morgan the Pet Shop down in Swansea," she said. She looked concerned for him. "Is there something wrong then, my love?"

"Wrong?" he cried. "Wrong? If the Russians don't get that back intact by the weekend they're going to recall their Ambassador. And look at it. Full of rainwater, and the mice in a blasted cage, and the plants climbing a wall." Which was just what he felt like doing himself.

Pursed her lips, did Gran. "Have to speak severely to that Ikey Shand," she said, "selling things not honestly come by."

And Vanwy wound her smooth arms about him and nestled her dark head against his neat suiting and murmured, "Not letting them take my pet from me, is it, Bob bach?" She remembered something else. "Heartbroken, Ceri would be, to lose her pretty mice." She reached up and kissed the tip of his chin.

Grandfather was more forthright. "That butt is on my land. And anyone trying to take it away will be committing a trespass."

Absently he slipped a couple of cartridges into his shotgun. "Not having any foreigners on my land. Worse than hikers." He glowered.

A kindly man, that Carruthers. Even in his own predicament he could not help feeling sorry for these simple people. So he said gently, "What you don't seem to realise is that this is Prime-Minister level." A phrase occurred to him. "I'm afraid that, through no fault of your own, you have become pawns on the international chessboard."

"Well, there is important," Gran said, impressed.

But Grandfather was not impressed. In fact, Mr. Carruthers found to his horror, he was now pointing his gun at Mr. Carruthers' middle. "Get in there," he said, opening the door of an outhouse.

"Oh no, Grandfather. Not with the bull," cried Vanwy.

"In," said the farmer, fiddling with the safety-catch.

Well, Mr. Carruthers didn't *think* he'd shoot. But he felt he didn't know quite enough about the Welsh character to be certain. And this, he felt, was a situation that called for certainty. So he went through the door, to be greeted by an angry bellow. The door shut behind him.

"Better keep quiet," came the farmer's voice. "Very neurotic, Glendower is."

In the darkness Mr. Carruthers could just see the vast bulk, the white nose, and the red-rimmed eyes of Glendower. He kept quiet. Very quiet. Bulls were another subject on which he wished he had just a little more knowledge . . .

Well, there is highhanded, you will say. And all for an old water butt.

But it went deeper than that. In the first place, this thing had broken Grandfather's fence. Secondly, the two great principles of privacy and ownership were being threatened. Thirdly, the old gentlemen was convinced that, with a little training, this new dog could win the Dinas Sheep Dog Trials blindfold. And he wasn't going to risk any interference with that. No. If that old Russian wanted a quarrel, he had chosen the right man . . .

Bob Carruthers crouched in the darkness. At first he hoped that he and Glendower might reach some sort of understanding. He'd read of prisoners making friends with all sorts of strange creatures: birds, mice, rats, even spiders.

But not, apparently, bulls. Glendower did not seem to cotton on to the idea. At the slightest movement he would give a furious bellow, like a schoolmaster quelling a fidgeting class. So Mr. Carruthers remained quelled; quelled, cramped, cold, and worried to death.

He *must* get this vital information to the authorities. But how? With a bloody-minded bull on this side of the door and a bloody-minded Welshman on the other, he was in an unenviable position.

His one hope was Vanwy. *She* wouldn't let him stay a prisoner for long. She would find a way to release him.

But the long day wore on; and the cracks of brightness through the door faded into greyness and finally disappeared. Night. Mr. Carruthers wondered whether bulls were heavy sleepers. Then—what was that? Yes, he was sure of it. Stealthy footsteps in the yard outside. She was coming at last.

The footsteps came nearer. There was a quick scrabbling at the door, the sound of a key turning in a lock. The light from an electric torch fell on his face. "Come on, then," whispered an urgent voice.

He staggered outside, and heard the door close quietly on an enraged Glendower. He was almost weeping with relief. What a wonderful girl this was. Resourceful and intelligent as well as beautiful. "I shall never be able to thank you enough, you darling," he whispered.

"Never mind that," said a bass voice. "Just clear out of here, quick."

Mr. Carruthers peered through the darkness at his rescuer. "Globe Trotter Thomas," he cried in amazement. "But—but why?"

"Three is a crowd," said Globe Trotter. "Go on, now. Down the hill with you."

"It's awfully nice of you, old chap," Carruthers said. And he meant it. Out of the dark yard he went, round to the front where the house was whitewashed with moonlight, and straight into Vanwy who was carrying a bowler hat, a rolled umbrella, his briefcase, and a small holdall.

"Just coming to rescue you, I was," she whispered.

"I've been rescued, thanks," he said with a touch of hauteur. She'd taken her time, he couldn't help feeling.

She put his hat on his head, hung his umbrella on his arm, put his briefcase in his hand, and kissed him on the lips. "Darling," she cried, lifting up her holdall. "I have got my little nightie."

He swallowed. "Good show," he said. Hand in hand they set off down the hill . . .

The following morning the Minister for Welsh Affairs entered his office. With a sigh he hung up his hat. There was only one thought in his mind. What the devil had happened to Carruthers?

And at that moment the door was flung open and Mr. Carruthers burst into the office, hand in hand with a young

woman. He came, rather sketchily, to attention. "Carruthers reporting, sir," he gasped.

"And about time, too," said the Minister, nasty. "Well, have you found it?"

"Yes, sir."

"Thank heaven for that. Where is it?"

"Full of rainwater, sir. The dog is rounding up sheep, the mice are in a cage, and the monkey—"

"Fast asleep, bless him," said Vanwy, opening her coat with a delightful smile.

The Minister looked at Vanwy. He looked at the monkey. He sat down rather suddenly and put his head in his hands.

"This is the end," he muttered. He cocked an eye at Carruthers. "Did you say full of rainwater?" he asked.

"Yes, sir."

Silence. "Then it must be emptied," the Minister said heavily. "And the livestock must be rounded up and replaced." He remembered something. "What about the plants?" he asked.

"Climbing up an outhouse," said Carruthers.

"Growing beautiful," said Vanwy.

"Then they must be uprooted."

"Can't do that," Vanwy said. "Break Gran's heart, it would."

Mr. Carruthers remembered his manners. "Vanwy, darling, this is the Minister for Welsh Affairs. Sir, this is the lady I hope to make my wife."

"Congratulations, I'm sure." Oh, very sour that Minister was.

But Vanwy said, "Did you say Welsh Affairs? Why, there is the Minister for Russian Affairs I took you for, wanting to give all our pretty pets back. Didn't ask them to drop their old rocket on Pen y Bont farm, did we, smashing the fence and frightening Glendower. Or maybe you think the Llangrwl Territorials shot it down with their old ack ack gun Blodwen." Oh, very beautiful she looked then, with her eyes flashing and an angry smile about her lovely mouth.

"You know, sir, there's something in what she says." Eagerly Carruthers leaned over the Minister's desk. "Why not tell them they can't have their ball back?"

"Are you mad?" said the Minister.

"No, sir. I just feel that, as Minister for Welsh Affairs, you might like to put your foot down."

The Minister chewed his thumb. "What would the P.M. say?"

"Blow the P.M.," said Mr. Carruthers.

"Can we go and get married now, dear?" asked Vanwy, who was getting a little bored.

"Soon, darling. Go on, sir. If it works you may well find yourself the next Foreign Secretary. Old Basil's getting a bit long in the tooth."

"If it doesn't I shall be back in the Post Office. Dash it, Carruthers, I've got to think about this."

"Let us go and get married while he makes his mind up," said Vanwy, squeezing her beloved's arm.

"A good idea," said Carruthers. "You'll excuse us, sir?" They tiptoed out.

But by the time they had got the licence from Westminster the placards were announcing, SATELLITE SENSATION.

Carruthers bought a paper.

SATELLITE AT BOTTOM OF WELSH LAKE, ran the headline.

It appeared that the pathetic corpses of a dog, a monkey, two rabbits, and three white mice had been found floating on the slate-grey waters of some lonely tarn. They had been festooned with some rather unusual creeper.

"What a wonderful example of British compromise," said Carruthers proudly. "Just read that, my love."

But Vanwy was much too busy reading the marriage licence.

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DO AS YOU WOULD BE DOUANE-D BY

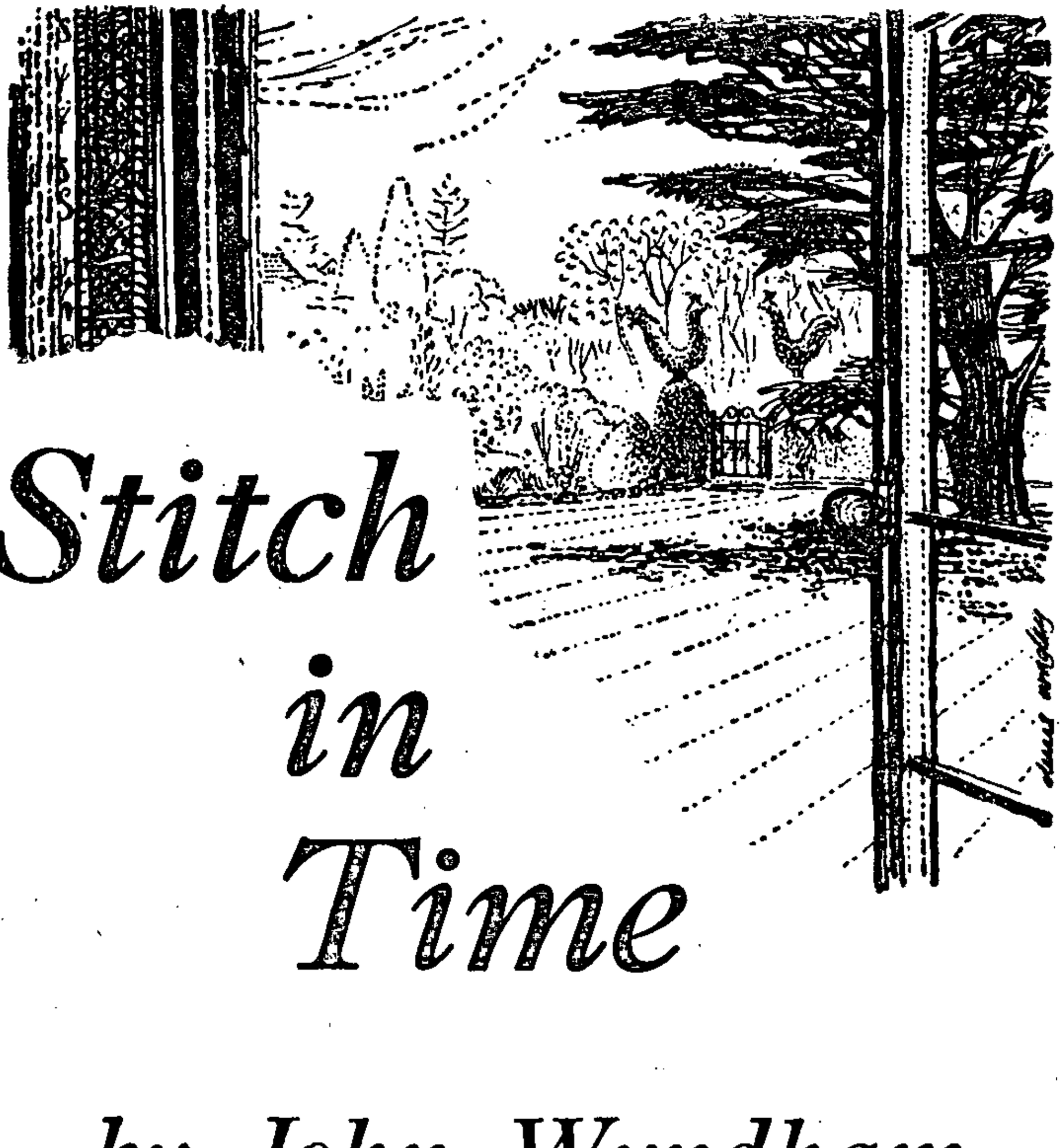
Don't think I *always* put my foot in my mouth. Sometimes it's a pencil. At least, that's what I used to fill out a Customs manifesto when I returned from a trip to Europe some time ago. I should have used a pen—with disappearing ink.

One of the questions was "What is your occupation?" Without pausing for anything that might qualify as deep cerebration, I filled in "smuggler."

How I ever got out of Customs in less than five hours will for ever remain a mystery. But don't think that it was a dull, inactive afternoon. Have you, dear reader, ever had the more remote portions of your anatomy subjected to non-therapeutic X-rays? Have you ever stood by while they performed the same delicate operation on your luggage? Have you ever taken off your shoes and watched an expert carefully rip out their inner soles in a systematic search for hidden gems?

All of these experiences can easily be yours. Just go to Europe and, when you return, fill in your Customs manifesto with the same unhesitating honesty that I did.

GROUCHO MARX, *Groucho And Me*



Stitch in Time

by John Wyndham

author of
The Day of the Triffids

ON THE sheltered side of the house the sun was hot. Just inside the open french windows Mrs. Dolderson moved her chair a few inches so that her head would remain in the shade while the warmth could comfort the rest of her. Then she leaned her head back on the cushion, looking out.

The scene was, for her, timeless.

Across the smooth lawn the cedar stood as it had always stood. Its flat-spread boughs must, she supposed, reach a little farther

now than they had when she was a child, but it was hard to tell; the tree had seemed huge then, it seemed huge now. Farther on, the boundary hedge was just as trim and neat as it had always been.

The gate into the spinney was still flanked by the two unidentifiable topiary birds, Cocky and Olly—wonderful that they should still be there, even though Olly's tail feathers had become a bit twiggy with age.

The flowerbed on the left, in front of the shrubbery, was as full of colour as ever—well, perhaps a little brighter; one had a feeling that flowers had become a trifle more strident than they used to be, but delightful nevertheless. The spinney beyond the hedge, however, had changed a little; more young trees, some of the larger ones gone. Between the branches were glimpses of pink roof where there had been no neighbours in the old days. Except for that one could almost, for a moment, forget a whole lifetime.

The afternoon drowsing while the birds rested, the bees humming, the leaves gently stirring, the bonk-bonk from the tennis court round the corner, with an occasional voice giving the score. It might have been any sunny afternoon out of fifty or sixty summers.

Mrs. Dolderson smiled upon it and loved it all; she had loved it when she was a girl, she loved it even more now.

In this house she had been born; she had grown up in it, married from it, come back to it after her father died, brought up her own two children in it, grown old in it. Some years after the second war she had come very near to losing it—but not quite; and here she still was . . .

It was Harold who had made it possible. A clever boy and a wonderful son. When it had become quite clear that she could no longer afford to keep the house up, that it would have to be sold, it was Harold who had persuaded his firm to buy it. Their interest, he had told her, lay not in the house, but in the site—as would any buyer's.

The house itself was almost without value now, but the position was convenient.

As a condition of sale, four rooms on the south side had been converted into a flat which was to be hers for life. The rest of the house had become a hostel housing some twenty young people who worked in the laboratories and offices which now stood on the north side, on the site of the stables and part of the paddock. One day, she knew, the old house would come down, she had seen the plans, but for the present, for her time, both it and the garden to the south and west could remain untouched. Harold

had assured her that they would not be required for fifteen or twenty years yet—much longer than she would know the need of them . . .

Nor, Mrs. Dolderson thought calmly, would she be really sorry to go. One became useless and, now that she must have a wheelchair, a burden to others. There was the feeling, too, that she no longer belonged—that she had become a stranger in another people's world. It had all altered so much; first changing into a place that it was difficult to understand, then growing so much more complex that one gave up trying to understand. No wonder, she thought, that the old become possessive about *things*: cling to objects which link them with the world that they could understand.

Harold was a dear boy, and for his sake she did her best not to appear too stupid—but, often, it was difficult. Today at lunch, for instance, he had been so excited about some experiment that was to take place this afternoon. He had *had* to talk about it, even though he must know that practically nothing of what he said was comprehensible to her.

Something about dimensions again—she had grasped that much, but she had only nodded, and not attempted to go further. Last time the subject had cropped up, she had observed that in her youth there had been only three, and she did not see how even all this progress in the world could have added more.

This had set him off on a dissertation about the mathematician's view of the world through which it was, apparently, possible to perceive the existence of a series of dimensions. Even the moment of existence in relation to time was, it seemed, some kind of dimension. Philosophically, Harold had begun to explain—but there, and at once, she had lost him. He led straight into confusion. She felt sure that when she was young philosophy, mathematics, and metaphysics had all been quite separate studies—nowadays they seemed to have quite incomprehensibly run together.

So this time she had listened quietly, making small encouraging sounds from time to time, until at the end he had smiled ruefully and told her she was a dear to be so patient with him. Then he had come round the table and kissed her cheek gently as he put his hand over hers, and she had wished him the best of luck with the afternoon's mysterious experiment. Then Jenny had come in to clear the table, and wheel her closer to the window . . .

The warmth of the slumbrous afternoon carried her into a half dream, took her back fifty years to just such an afternoon when she had sat here in this very window—though certainly with no thought of a wheelchair in those days—waiting for

Arthur . . . waiting with an ache in her heart for Arthur . . . and Arthur had never come.

Strange, it was, the way things fell out. If Arthur had come that day she would almost certainly have married him. And Harold and Cynthia would never have existed. She would have had children, of course, but they would not have been Harold and Cynthia.

What a curious, haphazard thing one's existence was. Just by saying "no" to one man, and "yes" to another a woman might bring into existence a potential archbishop or a potential murderer. How foolish they all were nowadays—trying to tidy everything up, make life secure, while behind, back in everyone's past, stretched the chance-studded line of women who had said "yes" or "no" as the fancy took them.

Curious that she should remember Arthur now. It must be years since she had thought of him . . .

She had been quite sure that he would propose that afternoon. It was before she had even heard of Colin Dolderson. And she would have agreed. Oh yes, she would have accepted him.

There had never been any explanation. She had never known *why* he did not come then—or any more. He had never written to her. Ten days, perhaps a fortnight later there had been a somewhat impersonal note from his mother telling her that he had been ill, and the doctor had advised sending him abroad. But after that, nothing at all—until the day she had seen his name in a newspaper, more than two years later.

She had been angry of course—a girl owed that to her pride—and hurt, too, for a time. Yet how could one know that it had not been for the best, in the end? Would his children have been as dear to her, or as kind and as clever as Harold and Cynthia?

Such an infinity of chances, all those genes and things they talked about nowadays . . .

The thump of tennis balls had ceased and the players had gone; back, presumably, to their recondite work. Bees continued to hum purposefully among the flowers; half a dozen butterflies were visiting there too, though in a dilettante, unairworthy-looking way. The farther trees shimmered in the rising heat. The afternoon's drowsiness became irresistible. Mrs. Dolderson did not oppose it. She leaned her head back, half aware that somewhere another humming sound, higher in pitch than the bees', had started, but it was not loud enough to be disturbing. She let her eyelids droop.

Suddenly, only a few yards away, but out of sight as she sat, there were feet on the path. The sound of them began quite

abruptly, as if someone had just stepped from the grass on to the path—only she would have seen anyone crossing the grass. Simultaneously there was the sound of a baritone voice, singing cheerfully but not loudly to itself, *Everybody's doin' it* It, too, began quite suddenly; in the middle of a word in fact. "*—rybody's doin' it . . .*"

The voice cut off suddenly. The footsteps, too, came to a dead stop.

Mrs. Dolderson's eyes were open now—very wide open. Her thin hands gripped the arms of her chair. She recollected the tune: more than that, she was even certain of the voice—after all these years. A silly dream, she told herself. She had been remembering him only a few moments before she closed her eyes. How foolish!

And yet it was curiously undreamlike. Everything was so sharp and clear, so familiarly reasonable. The arms of the chair quite solid under her fingers.

Another idea leapt into her mind. She had died. That was why it was not like an ordinary dream. Sitting here in the sun, she must have quietly died. The doctor had said it might happen quite unexpectedly. And now it had!

She had a swift moment of relief—not that she had felt any great fear of death, but there had been that sense of ordeal ahead. Now it was over—and with no ordeal. As simple as falling asleep. She felt suddenly happy about it; quite exhilarated. Though it was odd that she still seemed to be tied to her chair . . .

The gravel crunched under shifting feet. A bewildered voice said, " That's rum! Dashed queer! What the devil's happened? "

Mrs. Dolderson sat motionless in her chair. There was no doubt whatever about the voice.

A pause. The feet shifted, as if uncertain. Then they came on, but slowly now, hesitantly. They brought a young man into her view. Oh, such a very young man, he looked. She felt a little catch at her heart.

He was dressed in a striped club blazer and white flannel trousers. There was a silk scarf round his neck and, tilted back off his forehead, a straw hat with a coloured band. His hands were in his trousers pockets, and he carried a tennis racket under his left arm.

She saw him first in profile, and not quite at his best, for his expression was bewildered and his mouth slightly open as he stared towards the spinney at one of the pink roofs beyond.

" Arthur," Mrs. Dolderson said gently.

He was startled. The racket slipped, and clattered on the path. He attempted to pick it up, take off his hat, and recover

his composure, all at the same time; not very successfully. When he straightened, his face was pink and its expression still confused.

He looked at the old lady in the chair, her knees hidden by a rug, her thin delicate hands gripping the arms. His gaze went beyond her, into the room. His confusion increased, with a touch of alarm added. His eyes went back to the old lady.

She was regarding him intently. He could not recall ever having seen her before, did not know who she could be—yet in her eyes there seemed to be something faintly, faintly not unfamiliar.

She dropped her gaze to her right hand. She studied it for a moment as though it puzzled her a little, then she raised her eyes again to his.

"You don't know me, Arthur?" she asked quietly.

There was a note of sadness in her voice that he took for disappointment tinged with reproof. He did his best to pull himself together. "I—I'm afraid not," he confessed. "You see I—er—you—er—" He stuck, and then went on desperately, "You must be Thelma's—Miss Kilder's—aunt?"

She looked at him steadily for some moments. He did not understand her expression, but then she told him, "No. I am not Thelma's aunt."

Again his gaze went into the room behind her. This time he shook his head in bewilderment.

"It's all different—no, sort of half different," he said, in distress. "I say, I can't have come to the wrong—?" He broke off, and turned to look at the garden again. "No, it certainly isn't that," he answered himself decisively. "But what—what *has* happened?"

His amazement was no longer simple; he was looking badly shaken. His bewildered eyes came back to her again. "Please—I don't understand—*how* did you know me?" he asked.

His increasing distress troubled her, and made her careful. "I recognised you, Arthur. We have met before, you know."

"Have we? I can't remember. I'm terribly sorry."

"You're looking unwell, Arthur. Draw up that chair and rest a little."

"Thank you, Mrs.—er—Mrs.—?"

"Dolderson," she told him.

"Thank you, Mrs. Dolderson," he said, frowning a little, trying to place the name.

She watched him pull the chair closer. Every movement, every line familiar, even to the lock of his fair hair that always fell forward when he stooped. He sat down and remained silent

for some moments, staring under a frown, across the garden.

Mrs. Dolderson sat still, too. She was scarcely less bewildered than he, though she did not reveal it. Clearly the thought that she was dead had been quite silly. She was sitting just as usual in her chair, still aware of the ache in her back, still able to grip the arms of the chair and feel them. Yet it was not a dream. Everything was too textured, too solid, too real in a way that dream things never were. Too sensible, too—that was, they would have been had the young man been any other than Arthur.

Was it just a simple hallucination? A trick of her mind imposing Arthur's face on an entirely different young man?

She glanced at him. No, that would not do—he had answered to Arthur's name. Indubitably he was Arthur—and wearing Arthur's blazer, too. They did not cut them that way nowadays, and it was years and years since she had seen a young man wearing a straw hat.

A kind of ghost? But no—he was quite solid; the chair had creaked as he sat down, his shoes had crunched on the gravel. Besides, who ever heard of a ghost in the form of a thoroughly bewildered young man, and one, moreover, who had recently nicked himself in shaving?

He cut her thoughts short by turning his head.

"I thought Thelma would be here," he told her. "She *said* she'd be here. Please tell me, where is she?"

Like a frightened little boy, she thought. She wanted to comfort him, not to frighten him more. But she could think of nothing to say beyond, "Thelma isn't far away."

"I must find her. She'll be able to tell me what's happened." He made to get up.

She laid a hand on his arm, and pressed down gently.

"Wait a minute," she told him. "What is it that seems to have happened? What is it that worries you so much?"

"This," he said, waving a hand to include everything about them. "It's all different—and yet the same—and yet not. I feel as if—as if I'd gone a little mad."

She looked at him steadily, and then shook her head.

"I don't think you have. Tell me, what is it that's wrong?"

"I was coming here to play tennis—well, to see Thelma. really," he amended. "Everything was all right then—just as usual. I rode up the drive and leaned my bike against the big fir tree where the path begins. I started to come along the path, and then, just when I reached the corner of the house, everything went funny."

"Went funny," Mrs. Dolderson inquired, "what went funny?"

"Well, nearly everything. The sun seemed to jerk in the sky. The trees suddenly looked bigger, and not quite the same. The flowers in the bed over there went quite a different colour. This creeper which was all over the wall was suddenly only halfway up—and it looks like a different *kind* of creeper.

"And there are houses over there. I never saw them before—it's just an open field beyond the spinney. Even the gravel on the path looks more yellow than I thought. And this room. It *is* the same room. I know that desk and the fireplace—and those two pictures. But the paper is quite different. I've never seen that before—but it isn't new, either. Please tell me where Thelma is. I want her to explain it. I *must* have gone a bit mad."

She put her hand on his, firmly. "No," she said decisively. "Whatever it is, I'm quite sure it's not that."

"Then what—?" He broke off abruptly and listened, his head a little on one side. The sound grew. "What is it?" he asked anxiously.

Mrs. Dolderson tightened her hand over his. "It's all right," she said, as if to a child. "It's all right, Arthur."

She could feel him grow tenser as the sound increased. It passed right overhead at less than a thousand feet, jets shrieking, leaving the buffeted air behind it rumbling back and forth, shuddering gradually back to peace.

Arthur saw it. Watched it disappear. His face when he turned it back to her was white and frightened. In a queer voice he asked, "What—what was that?"

Quietly, as if to force calm upon him, she said, "Just an aeroplane, Arthur. Such horrid, noisy things they are."

He gazed where it had vanished, and shook his head.

"But I've *seen* an aeroplane, and *heard* it. It isn't like that. It makes a noise like a motorbike, only louder. This was terrible! I don't understand—I don't understand what's happened." His voice was pathetic.

Mrs. Dolderson made as if to reply, and then checked at a thought, a sudden sharp recollection of Harold talking about dimensions, of shifting them into different planes, speaking of time as though it were simply another dimension.

With a kind of shock of intuition she understood—no, understood was too firm a word—she perceived. But, perceiving, she found herself at a loss. She looked again at the young man. He was still tense, trembling slightly. He was wondering whether he was going out of his mind. She must stop that. There was no kind way—but how to be least unkind?

"Arthur," she said abruptly.

He turned a dazed look on her.

Deliberately she made her voice brisk. "You'll find a bottle of brandy in that cupboard. Please fetch it—and two glasses," she ordered.

With a kind of sleepwalking movement he obeyed. She filled a third of a tumbler with brandy for him, and poured a little for herself. "Drink that," she told him. He hesitated. "Go on," she commanded. "You've had a shock. It will do you good. I want to talk to you, and I can't talk to you while you're knocked half silly."

He drank, and coughed a little, and sat down again.

"Finish it," she told him firmly. He finished it.

Presently she inquired, "Feeling better now?"

He nodded, but said nothing. She made up her mind, and drew breath carefully. Dropping the brisk tone altogether, she asked, "Arthur. Tell me, what day is it today?"

"Day?" he said, in surprise. "Why, it's Friday. It's the —er—twenty-seventh of June."

"But the year, Arthur. What year?"

He turned his face fully towards her. "I'm not really mad, you know. I know who I am, and where I am—I think. It's *things* that have gone wrong, not me. I can tell you—"

"What I want you to tell me, Arthur, is the year." The peremptory note was back in her voice again.

He kept his eyes steadily on hers as he spoke.

"1913, of course," he said.

Mrs. Dolderson's gaze went back to the lawn and the flowers. She nodded gently. That was the year—and it had been a Friday; odd that she should remember that. It might well have been the twenty-seventh of June. But certainly a Friday in the summer of 1913 was the day he had not come. All so long, long ago . . .

His voice recalled her. It was unsteady with anxiety.

"Why—why do you ask me that—about the year, I mean?"

His brow was so creased, his eyes so anxious. He was very young. Her heart ached for him. She put her thin fragile hand on his strong one again.

"I—I think I know," he said shakily. "It's—I don't see how, but you wouldn't have asked that unless— That's the queer thing that's happened, isn't it? Somehow it isn't 1913 any longer—that's what you mean? The way the trees grew; that aeroplane." He stopped, staring at her with wide eyes. "You must tell me. Please, please. What's happened to me? Where am I now? Where is this?"

"My poor boy—" she murmured.

"Oh, please."

The Times, with the crossword partly done, was pushed down into the chair beside her. She pulled it out half reluctantly. Then she folded it over and held it towards him. His hand shook as he took it.

"London, Monday, 1st July," he read. And then, in an incredulous whisper, "1963!"

He lowered the page, looked at her imploringly.

She nodded twice, slowly.

They sat staring at one another without a word. Gradually, his expression changed. His brows came together, as though with pain. He looked round jerkily, his eyes darting here and there as if for an escape. Then they came back to her. He screwed them shut for a moment. Then opened them again, full of hurt—and fear.

"Oh no, no! No! You're not— You can't be. You—you told me— You're Mrs. Dolderson, aren't you? You said you were. You can't—you can't be—Thelma?"

Mrs. Dolderson said nothing. They gazed at one another. His face creased up like a small child's. "Oh, God! Oh—oh—oh!" he cried, and hid his face in his hands.

Mrs. Dolderson's eyes closed for a moment. When they opened she had control of herself again. Sadly she looked on the shaking shoulders. Her thin, blue-veined left hand reached out towards the bowed head and stroked the fair hair gently.

Her right hand found the bell-push on the table beside her. She pressed it, and kept her finger upon it.

At the sound of movement her eyes opened. The venetian blind shaded the room but let in light enough for her to see Harold standing beside her bed.

"I didn't mean to wake you, Mother," he said.

"You didn't wake me, Harold. I was dreaming, but I was not asleep. Sit down, my dear. I want to talk to you."

"You mustn't tire yourself, Mother. You've had a bit of a relapse, you know."

"I daresay, but I find it more tiring to wonder than to know. I shan't keep you long."

"Very well, Mother." He pulled a chair close to the bedside and sat down, taking her hand in his. She looked at his face in the dimness.

"It was you who did it, wasn't it, Harold? It was that experiment of yours that brought poor Arthur here?"

"It was an accident, Mother."

"Tell me."

"We were trying it out. Just a preliminary test. We knew

it was theoretically possible. We had shown that if we could—oh dear, it's so difficult to explain in words—if we could, well, twist a dimension, kind of fold it back on itself, then two points that are normally apart must coincide. I'm afraid that's not very clear."

"Never mind, dear. Go on."

"Well, when we had our field-distortion-generator fixed up we set it to bring together two points that are normally fifty years apart. Think of folding over a long strip of paper that has two marks on it, so that the marks are brought together."

"Yes?"

"It was quite arbitrary. We might have chosen ten years or a hundred, but we just picked on fifty. And we got astonishingly close, too, Mother, quite remarkably close. Only a four-day calendar error in fifty years. It's staggered us. The thing we've got to do now is to find out that source of error, but if you'd asked any of us to bet—"

"Yes, dear, I'm sure it was quite wonderful. But what *happened*?"

"Oh, sorry. Well, as I said, it was an accident. We only had the thing switched on for three or four seconds—and he must have walked slap into the field of coincidence right then. An outside—a millions-to-one-chance. I wish it had not happened, but we couldn't possibly know."

She turned her head on the pillow.

"No. You couldn't know," she agreed. "And then?"

"Nothing, really. We didn't know until Jenny answered your bell and found you in a faint, and this chap, Arthur, all gone to pieces, and sent for me.

"One of the girls helped to get you to bed. Dr. Sole arrived, and took a look at you. Then he pumped some kind of tranquilliser into this Arthur. The poor fellow needed it, too—one hell of a thing to happen when all you were expecting was a game of tennis with your best girl.

"When he'd quietened down a bit he told us who he was, and where he'd come from. Well, there was a thing for you! Accidental living proof at the first shot.

"But all he wanted, poor devil, was to get back just as soon as he could. He was very distressed—quite a painful business. Dr. Sole wanted to put him right under to stop him cracking altogether. It looked that way, too—and it didn't look as if he'd be any better when he came round again, either.

"We didn't know if we *could* send him back. Transference forward, to put it crudely, can be regarded as an infinite acceleration of a natural progression, but the idea of transference back is full of the most disconcerting implications once you start

thinking about it. There was quite a bit of argument, but Dr. Sole clinched it.

"If there was a fair chance, he said, the chap had a right to try, and we had an obligation to try to undo what we'd done to him. Apart from that, if we did not attempt it we should certainly have to explain to someone how we came to have a raving loony on our hands, and fifty years off course, so to speak.

"We tried to make it clear to this Arthur that we couldn't be sure that it would work in reverse—and that, anyway, there was this four-day calendar error, so at best it wouldn't be exact. I don't think he really grasped that. The poor fellow was in a wretched state; all he wanted was just a chance—any kind of chance—to get out of here. He was simply one-track.

"So we decided to take the risk. After all, if it turned out not to be possible he'd—well, he'd know nothing about it or nothing would happen at all.

"The generator was still on the same setting. We put one fellow on to that, took this Arthur back to the path by your room, and got him lined up there.

"'Now walk forward,' we told him, 'just as you were walking when it happened.' And we gave the switch-on signal. What with the doctor's dope and one thing and another he was pretty groggy, but he did his best to pull himself together. He went forward at a kind of stagger. Literal-minded fellow; he was half crying, but in a queer sort of voice he was trying to sing, *Everybody's doin' it*.

"And then he disappeared—just vanished completely." He paused, and added regretfully, "All the evidence we have now is not very convincing: one tennis racket, practically new, but vintage, and one straw hat, ditto."

Mrs. Dolderson lay without speaking.

He said, "We did our best, Mother. We could only try."

"Of course you did, dear. And you succeeded. It wasn't your fault that you couldn't undo what you'd done. No, I was just wondering what would have happened if it had been a few minutes earlier—or later, that you had switched your machine on. But I don't suppose that *could* have happened. *You* wouldn't have been here at all if it had."

He regarded her a little uneasily.

"What *do* you mean, Mother?"

"Never mind, dear. It was, as you said, an accident. At least, I suppose it was; though so many important things seem to be accidents that one does sometimes wonder if they aren't really written somewhere."

Harold looked at her, trying to make something of that, then

he decided to ask, "But what makes you think that we did succeed in getting him back, Mother?"

"Oh, I *know* you did, dear. For one thing I can very clearly remember the day I read in the paper that Lieutenant Arthur Waring Batley had been awarded the D.S.O.—sometime in November 1915, I think it was.

"And, for another, I have just had a letter from your sister."

"From Cynthia? How on earth does she come into it?"

"She wants to come and see us. She is thinking of getting married again, and she'd like to bring the young man—well, not such a very young man, I suppose—down here to show him."

"That's all right, but I don't see—"

"She thinks you might find him interesting. He's a physicist."

"But—"

Mrs. Dolderson took no notice of the interruption. She went on, "Cynthia tells me his name is Batley, the son of a Colonel Arthur Waring Batley, D.S.O., of Nairobi, Kenya."

"You mean, he's the son of—?"

"So it would seem, dear. Odd, isn't it?" She reflected a moment, and added, "I must say that if these things *are* written, they do sometimes seem to be written in a very queerly distorted way, don't you think?"

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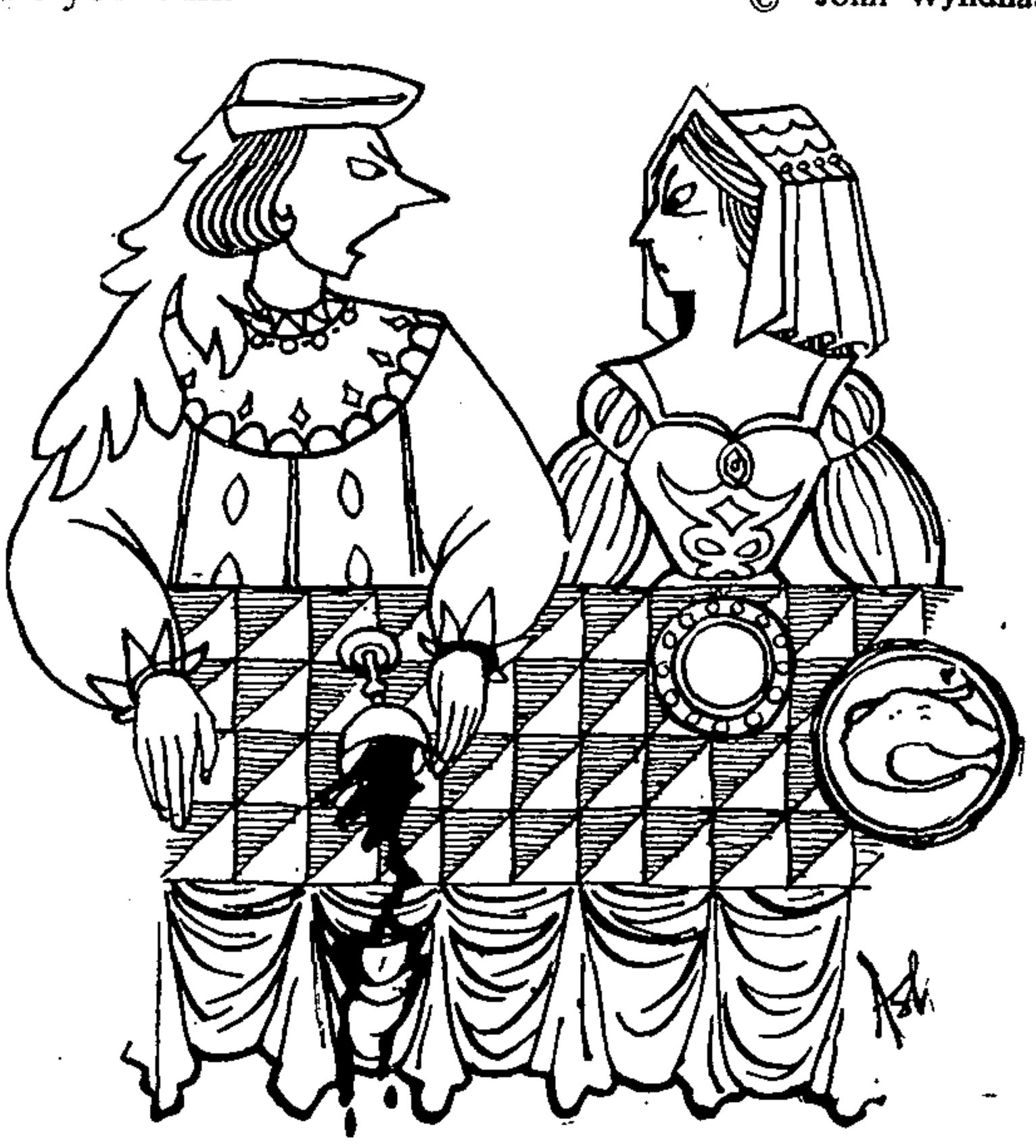

"How can I help it when there's no damn perspective!"

SALT OF THE EARTH

No sense a man working when he doesn't need to

BY JACK SCHAEFER

OLD CLYDE FOSKINS finished milking the one old cow and turned her out into the poled pasture behind the barn where a few clumps of winter-cured grass remained. He tilted the milk from the pail through a strainer into another pail. He carried this out and to the well and pulled on a cord hanging down in the shadowy depth until a large glass mason jar rose dripping from the water.

Carefully he unscrewed the top and filled the jar from the pail. Carefully he screwed the top tight again and lowered the jar into the water. He stared down after it, sniffling some through his limp moustache. "Beats any icebox," he said. "Keeps it cold in summer. Keeps it from freezing in winter."

He picked up the pail and went to the pigpen beside the barn and poured the rest of the milk into the tin-lined trough there. He watched the old boar and two unwieldy sows jostle each other for position. "Funny way of doing," he said. "Take it out of one critter and put it right back into some others."

He carried the empty pail into the barn and hung it with the other on their regular nails in an overhead beam. He stood peering about the dim interior wrinkling his nose. "Kind of sour. Needs an airing." He pushed and heaved at the wide old main doors and the hangers squealed on the track above and the doors moved and the morning sunlight streamed through the opening.

Old Clyde Foskins stood in the wide doorway and looked across the rutted barnyard at the brown field beyond long since stripped of the last grass tufts and at the horse close behind the rails, still, motionless, a part of the brown country stretching on to the broken gullies that led to the far hills. Gaunt with age, big bones pushing against shrunken hide, the horse stood as if propped on four stiff legs and the big head hung low with its weight, almost touching the ground.

Old Clyde whistled through his moustache, sharp and shrill. The big ears of the horse twitched and the head rose a few inches and stopped and sank slowly again.

He turned back into the barn and reached with a fork to pull hay from the low loft. He gathered an armful and went out and across the barnyard and dropped it over the rails close by the big head. "Cri-ma-nently!" he said. "Get some interest in life. At least you can still eat."

The head moved and the neck stretched and the horse took a mouthful of hay, not in hunger but in old instinctive obedience to do what was wanted. The big jaws ground in slow rhythm working the hay back over worn gums and the nubs of the few remaining teeth.

Old Clyde slapped his hands on the top rail and surveyed the horse from scraggly burr-locked tail to greying bearded muzzle. "You certainly ain't very pretty," he said. "Crowbait, that's about all. Maybe even they'd pass you by."

The horse rolled its eyes towards him till the white of the near one showed plain and he slapped his hands on the top rail again. "Don't go getting worried. It's near to ploughing time, certain enough, but I'll not be making you do that. I'll be getting me another one. Maybe two. It'll take two to match what you were."

He rubbed his hands along the rail and stared at them and for a moment had trouble seeing them through the mistiness clouding his eyes. "You've done enough for a dozen," he said. He pushed against the rail and straightened his old shoulders. "Company. That'll perk you some."

He snorted at himself and at the horse in exasperation. "No. You don't need company. Not at your age." He turned and started across the barnyard ruts towards the small back porch of the silent three-roomed house. "Like me," he said.

Sunlight through the kitchen window had reached the crack in the floorboards that meant the general neighbourhood of two o'clock. Old Clyde sat at the kitchen table turning and re-turning the pages of last week's newspaper and worked with slow sips at the last cup of coffee, re-heated, half milk the way he liked it, from the pot made for lunch. Old dishes on the shelf above the corner cupboard rattled gently and he looked up and out of the window and heard the hoofs first then saw the team of small quick-stepping trotters and then the buggy sagging with the weight of his two stout sons as it slid to a stop in the lane beside the house.

He started up in sudden eagerness and put his face close to the

glass and dropped back into the chair. "Cri-ma-nently," he said. "Both at once. That means something."

He pushed up again, slowly, and went to the door and opened it for them. "Afternoon, Ed. Same, Mert. Find yourselves chairs. Won't take a moment for a fresh pot of coffee."

"Not now, Father." Ed Foskins, owner of the trotters, owner of a smooth fresh face, ruddy with good living, watched his younger brother hurry to the nearest chair and sink his wide shape on it with a sigh. "What's the matter, Mert? That road get you? You're softer than me already."

He closed the door and stood with his back against it, facing old Clyde. "No time for coffee, Father. I have to be back at the bank by closing. Mert here oughtn't be away from the store. But lord knows when we'd have another chance to get out here. We want to talk to you."

Old Clyde backed across the room until he felt the sustaining solidity of the table behind him. He was painfully aware of his unshaven face, of his crusted heavy work shoes and stained dungarees and patched flannel shirt. He looked from one to the other of his sons, neat and respectable in their town clothes, and as always pride and regret matched themselves in him.

"Go ahead, talk," he said.

Mert shifted for more comfort on his chair. "Ed'll do it. But I agree with him. Absolutely. It's logical. It's right."

"Well now." Ed Foskins, the glib one, the good talker, swung into his stride. "We didn't want to rush you right after the funeral and all. But it's been six months now since Mother was buried—"

"Six months," old Clyde said, "and four days."

"Right. And four days. But you can't go on living way out here alone. It isn't natural. It doesn't make sense. On an old rundown farm that—"

"It ain't rundown!" Old Clyde's voice shook with indignation. "I had a good corn crop last year, didn't I? Wheat did good too. Paid off my seed loan and some over. You ought to know, you being in the bank."

"Well, yes, sure you did. But you don't need to. That's it. That's the point. No sense a man working when he doesn't need to. You've done your share. All Mert and me can remember when we were boys is you working. All the time. Never any end to it. And you don't need to any more. I checked your account again this morning. You've got better than two thousand. With what you can get for this place, which won't be too much but I can help you get what it's worth, you'd have enough to take it easy in town for—well, for—for as long as—"

"Go ahead, say it!" Old Clyde's voice shook again. "For the little time I've got left, you mean. I know that ain't much. I'm your father but I'm old enough to be your grandfather, I got married so damn late." The words were coming and he could not stop them. "Maybe that's why we didn't get along so good, you had to hurry out of here into town soon as you could. Both of you. Maybe I was too old already to be the kind of father you wanted.

"Well, you wasn't exactly the kind of sons I wanted either. Had to keep after you getting things done around here. Had to do most of it myself. Well, I did it, didn't I? And, well, I'm older now. But I ain't afraid of it."

He shifted along the table and round the corner and sank into the chair there and pushed with a shaking finger at his half-empty coffee cup. "Cri-ma-nently! I ain't meaning to get mad. What d'you have to keep worrying about me now for? Whyn't you just let me worry about myself?"

Mert Foskins teetered his bulk forward on his chair.

"See, Ed? Still the old rooster. That's what I keep telling Flossie. I want him to move in with us. Pay a little board to help out but that's all. Be good for the kids, the way she keeps spoiling—"

"Shut up, Mert." Ed Foskins, the elder, the leader from boyhood, was in command. He took a deep breath. "Father, you don't understand. We aren't trying to push you into anything. We're just thinking what's good for you. These days people take things easier. There's no sense doing the way you do, rest some in winter and then be at it every daylight hour soon as the ground is soft enough for ploughing. Maybe that made sense when it was the only way to get along. These days things are different.

"How do you think you make Mert and me feel, us doing well in town and you living out here like you didn't have a nickel?" Ed Foskins saw the muscles of old Clyde's face tightening.

"Now wait a minute, Father. This is hard to say, to you anyway, but I'm saying it. Maybe now Mert and me are older too and we're realising a few things we didn't before. We wouldn't be where we are now if you hadn't worked like that. Not many men could do what you did, past fifty already and with a wife and two little kids and having to start all over again with nothing on a piece of poor government land.

"You raised us and you squawked when we pulled out, but all the same you helped us get started in town with what you could and, well, your job's done and it's about time you quit working and took life easy. Mert and me, we—"

Old Clyde was no longer listening. His head was high. He was thinking back twenty-some years. "I had a horse," he said.

He looked out the window past the buggy and the shining young trotters, beyond the fence, at the big gaunt figure propped on four stiff legs, head low, motionless. "I've still got him."

Mert's chair squealed as he straightened on it. "You mean that rack of bones out there is old Mark? I thought he was gone years ago. Must be more'n thirty."

"Twenty-eight," old Clyde said. "Twenty-five years I've had him and twenty-five years he's been doing anything I ever asked of him." Old Clyde's head dropped and he stared down at his coffee cup. "Nearly twenty-five anyway."

"You mean—" Ed Foskins was surprised—"you mean you've been thinking of going right on farming and with that old horse?"

"No!" Old Clyde pushed his coffee cup clattering on its saucer. He looked up at Ed, half apologetic, half defiant. "Not that horse. He's done his share. Gave out on me one day last fall and more'n about time the way I see it. I been figuring to get another one. Maybe a team. Herb Calloway towards town has a few for sale."

He grabbed the cup and gulped the cold remainder of his coffee and wiped his moustache. "No sirree bob, that horse ain't going to do another day's work. He's earned his rest. He's going to get plenty to eat and loaf around and take it easy and—" Old Clyde stopped, startled at his own words.

"That's right!" Ed Foskins jumped at the chance. "That's exactly what we mean. You've earned your rest too. You're going to loaf around and take it easy and let somebody else, me and Marilyn or Mert and Flossie or likely both of us in turn, take care of you and see you get decent meals. You're going to quit working and do just what you feel like doing and not a damn thing else. You said it yourself. You've earned it."

Old Clyde felt trapped and by his own reasoning and this time he felt no answering urge to pull free. He was suddenly aware of what he had kept hidden, even from himself, the tiredness deep in him, the desire to be still, like the big gaunt figure out by the fence, head low, doing nothing.

"I don't know," he said. "I been getting muddled, off and on, lately. Never could figure things quick like you, Ed." He slumped lower on the chair and felt the tiredness taking him. "But I'd just be a nuisance around."

"Sure you would. But so what?" Ed Foskins, the first rebel, the sound at heart, grinned in remembrance. "Me and Mert were nuisances to you. Turn-about's fair enough."

"No," old Clyde said. "I can't do it. There's that horse—"

Mert's chair squealed again. "Old Mark? Him too. There's a field back of my place. Won't cost much to rent it."

"Well, then," Ed said quickly. "That's settled. That's the way to do things, make up your mind and do them. Suppose you move in with Mert first. My new place isn't finished yet and he has more room right now. You'll be wanting a little time to get used to the idea. Suppose we make it week after next. Monday. I'll send a wagon . . ."

Old Clyde Foskins stood on his little back porch and watched the buggy back and swing and move out of the lane into the road. There was an ache in his throat, a tightness no gulping could ease. "I didn't know they felt that way," he said.

He watched the buggy dwindle into the distance and drop out of sight beyond the first rolling ridge. "Maybe Ed's right. Maybe Ed's been right all along. Certainly doing well." He saw the buggy, small, a moving dot in the distance, top the second and higher rolling ridge and disappear beyond towards town. He turned slowly and looked at his old outbuildings and the leaning fences in ragged lines between his fields. "It is kind of rundown. Needs a lot of fixing. No sense doing that now."

The water was hot on the stove, steaming in the bucket and making it wobble on the rusty burner. Old Clyde sloshed some into the dishpan and did up his breakfast dishes with a minimum of soap and effort. He rubbed one hand round his chin and felt the stubble there. "Cri-ma-nently," he said. "Must be a week, ten days, since I shaved last. Time's coming and they'll be wanting to slick me some. Might as well get in practice."

He sloshed more water into a basin and set this on the chest-high shelf by the window. He rooted around in the corner cupboard until he found his nubbin of a brush and his old straight-edge. He put these with a small square mirror on the shelf beside the basin and went to work on his whiskers. He pulled at the loose skin under his chin to stretch out the wrinkles and let the blade catch the bristles.

"Kind of a silly business," he said. "Most natural thing in the world for a man to have hair on his face. Wouldn't feel a man without it. Yet right away they have to come off."

He rooted in the cupboard again and found a pair of old scissors and went back by the shelf and started trimming his moustache. "Got to be more particular. Bird could build a nest in this thing."

Suddenly he pulled back and stared at himself hard in the mirror. "Talking to myself. How long've I been doing that?"

He shrugged his old shoulders and grabbed the flour sacking

that served for a towel and rubbed his face vigorously. "Ain't nobody's business but my own anyway." He tossed the flour sacking on the table. "But it will be. Have to quit it come next Monday."

He was reaching to gather the things on the shelf when he caught a glimpse of movement through the window. He shifted to see more clearly. Out in the field, just beyond the fence, the big gaunt figure was moving. Head up, sniffing the air, stiff and awkward with age, the old horse was walking along the fence line. It reached the gate opposite the barn and stopped and looked over. It turned and came back to the familiar resting spot opposite the house and turned and started up along the fence line again.

Old Clyde watched, his eyebrows twitching upwards. "Well now," he said, "look at him perking some. Must be a touch of spring."

He went out on his little back porch and sniffed the air himself. The unending wind was strong and chill but faint along its edges was the old eternal promise. He drew in a deep breath. "It's there. Snow's been gone about three weeks. Dampness going. A man figuring on some planting would be getting the ground ready."

He sighed softly. "Not me. Mighty nice not to have that hanging over me any more. Sit all day if I feel like it."

Inside, by the stove, old Clyde soaked up warmth and began to leaf through his pile of farm journals for the articles he had always intended to read but never got around to. He read slowly, sometimes following the lines with a blunt forefinger, mumbling the words to himself, agreeing and disagreeing with what he read.

The sun inched across the kitchen floor and he hitched his chair along to follow it. And outside the wind blew and carried its ancient message and the sun shone and the old horse stood in its resting place opposite the house, head low, motionless, and now and again raised its head and sniffed and walked, slow and ungainly with the wind ruffling its long winter hair, up along the fence line to look over the gate opposite the barn and swing round and return.

Old Clyde fidgeted on his chair. Suddenly he dropped the journal he was holding. "Got things to do. Might as well get at them."

He went to the dusty telephone on the front room wall and took down the earpiece and cranked the handle on the side. He gave his number and waited a moment and then, as always, put his mouth close and shouted. "Mrs. Calloway? Clyde Foskins down the road. You tell Herb I've got a cow and some pigs to sell

him. You tell him to be here right after lunch or I'll sell 'em to somebody else."

Herb Calloway finished fastening the tail gate of his big stock wagon. He climbed to the driving seat and waved a cheery farewell. He clucked to his team of plump young workhorses and they surged willingly into the traces. Old Clyde watched the wagon turn into the road and start its steady rolling into the distance. The sun was so warm on his bare head and old jacket that he settled himself on the edge of the back porch to enjoy it.

He chuckled softly to himself. "These younger ones don't know how to bargain any more. Got eleven dollars more'n the top I figured on getting."

Out in the field, just beyond the fence, the old horse had turned, head up, to watch the young team go past. It swung round and started up along the fence line and broke into a lumbering trot. It stopped by the gate opposite the barn and looked over.

Old Clyde studied it, eyebrows twitching. "What you so all-fired interested in that barn for? There's hay out there if you want it."

He moved a bit to look at the old barn straight on and saw that the wind was swaying one of the big main doors and that the wood at the top was rotten and the hangers were tearing loose.

"Well, now, ain't that too bad," he said. "Can't argue I'll be sorry to leave this rundown old place, everything falling apart."

He let his breath out in a long sigh. "Mighty nice not to have to be doing things all the time. Just what I feel like doing. Right now I feel like sitting."

He sat in the sun and watched the old horse go back down the fence line, wait a moment, turn and go up again and stop by the gate, and swing yet again and repeat the manœuvre over and over.

"Cri-ma-nently!" He stood up. "If you want some exercise, why keep following that fence? You've got a whole damn field to move around in."

He walked towards the barn and stood staring up at the creaking door. "Shucks. Might as well fix that anyway. Can't get a good price, things falling apart."

The wind blew, steady and chill but with a softness blunting its bite, and fiddled with the edges of the loosened worn shingles old Clyde was renailing on the barn roof. The morning sun was warm on his back. He fastened the last shingle and inched, crablike, down the slope to the ladder.

Rung by rung he descended, moving slowly, calculating each step like a man who knows his muscles have lost their snap and he must use what strength he has carefully, spread out over a job.

On the ground, he straightened himself, wincing a little at the twinges in his back. He looked up the ladder. "Well, now," he said, "that ought to be worth fifty dollars more on the price."

He went round and through the wide open doorway and hung his old hammer on the wall between its two nails. He stood in the doorway and saw the big gaunt figure in the field moving, moving, slowly, steadily, up the fence line and stop and down and return, wearing ever deeper into the pathway already worn.

Suddenly an anger out of nowhere forced his voice into a shout. "Stop it! What's got into you?"

The old horse had reached the gate opposite the barn again. It looked over and across the barnyard at him. One big forefoot rose and pawed at the lowest rail. There was a small crackling sound and little splinters broke from the wood. Old Clyde stared and as he stared the anger dwindled in him.

He went towards the gate and the old horse raised its head higher and whiffled softly at him and pressed its chest forward against the top rail. "Mark," he said. "Mark, boy. You want out? What in hell for?"

He felt a strange lightheadedness, a deliberate emptiness of thought. He stepped forward, hardly aware what he was doing, and the horse stepped back and he tugged at the rails till they fell at his feet.

Head high, breathing deeply, the old horse stepped over them and past him. Straight to the barn it went and in through the wide doorway.

He followed. He stood in the doorway and saw it standing, waiting, motionless, patient, by the harness rack, and seeing he felt the anger flare and fill him, strong and bitter. "So you think you've still got it in you! I'll show you! You couldn't drag it ten feet!"

With trembling, hurrying fingers he snatched the old bridle with its long driving reins from its peg and jammed the rusty bit between the big old waiting jaws. He grabbed the harness and threw it over the big bony frame. He fought with the buckles to fasten them and cursed at the clumsiness of haste. He took the reins and slapped with the loose ends hard at the horse's rump and swung it round and backed it to where the old plough lay on the barn floor. He fastened the traces with sharp jerks, muttering steadily under his breath. He took the reins again and slapped again with the loose ends.

"All right, get moving! I'll show you! I'll show you good!"

Head high, ears forward, the old horse moved and the old plough clattered on its side along the rough floor planks and old Clyde walked beside it. Out of the barn, round the pigpen, past

the empty back pasture, to the wide spreading rear field where the corn stubble marked its old rows with withered tufted weeds and grass between.

Old Clyde's voice rose, still in anger but with a note of frantic appeal. "Cri-ma-nently! Ain't I been telling you? You're too old! There ain't any sense to it! Wait'll the share digs in! That'll show you!"

He yanked on the reins and the old horse stopped, leaning its weight slightly forward into the harness to hold the traces tight. Quickly, with the sureness of old habit, he knotted the rein ends together and flipped the loop over his head and round his shoulders. He leaned and took hold of the plough handles and struggled with them until the plough was upright, ready.

"Giddap!" he yelled. "Yank your goddamn heart out! That'll learn you!"

The old horse surged forward and as it moved old Clyde heaved up on the handles so that the blade pointed into the ground. Smoothly, surely, the blade sank in and levelled for the straight pull and stopped against the hard mass of the subsoil.

He heard the breath of the old horse wheeze in its throat and saw the ribs straining through the shaggy hide and the old cracked hoofs digging into the dirt—and the plough moved, slow, hesitating, forward and stop and forward again and not stopping and the clean earth rolled from the mouldboard and lay in a darkened ribbon by the fresh furrow beside his plodding feet.

Slowly, unsteadily, but always forward, concentrating with an intense earnestness, the horse and the man with the plough biting into the earth between them crawled along the length of the wide spreading field.

They stopped at the far end and old Clyde turned his head to look back along the furrow. "Cri-ma-nently," he said softly. "Straight as a string."

He jerked his head round and pulled quickly on the plough to free the blade from the ground, for the old horse, breathing heavily, was moving again, was starting to swing in the arc that would bring them round for the return trip back along the field. He fought with the plough to get it turned in time and pulled it upright and heaved quickly on the handles so they would not lose the forward momentum and the blade sank into the ground and levelled and the new furrow began to unroll.

And suddenly he was no longer an old man plodding along, ploughing often-ploughed ground behind an old gaunt horse that struggled with each forward step, whose big old bones thrust out against shrunken hide. He was a man with snap still in his knees, striding along, striding behind a huge young horse, filled out,

great-muscled, sleek with sweat, big head slogging forward into the terrific strain as the plough sliced deep through the tangled matted roots of virgin prairie sod.

"Yippee!" he yelled. "Smash into it, Mark, boy! I know what people are saying. 'That Foskins is a damn fool. He'll never make it. Have to have oxen or a four-horse span to break that ground.' I ain't got those. But I've got you, boy! We'll show 'em!"

He was striding along, feet striking firm beside the furrow, striding along behind huge young Mark, the tireless, the indomitable, great heart driving great muscles, ploughing forward through unending resistant sod, through the days and the weeks and the months, and the sweat of their work salted the earth of the years.

Old Clyde Foskins realised he was standing still, gripping the plough handles so hard that his fingers hurt. The plough had stopped.

Ahead of him the old horse wavered on four stiff legs and shudders ran through its body and its breath whistled shrill in its throat. The big head sank lower and lower and the big gaunt frame crumpled and toppled forward and sideways and to the ground and the weight dragging on the harness pulled the plough over on its side.

Carefully old Clyde lifted the knotted reins over his head and dropped them. He went round by the still figure and looked down. The eyes were open, staring, and there was no life in them.

He stood quietly, looking down, for a long time. "It'll take a mighty big hole," he said.

He raised his head and looked out along the fresh furrows. "I expect a corner of this field'll be about right. It's as much his as mine."

He stood quietly, staring into the distance.

He raised one calloused old hand and brushed it across his eyes to clear the mistiness from them. "Yes," he said. "Yes. He was right. That's the way to do it."

He walked, slowly and steadily, out of the field, past the empty back pasture, round the empty pigpen, across the barnyard, up on his little back porch, and into the house. He went straight to the dusty telephone on the front room wall and took down the earpiece and cranked the handle. He gave his number and waited. He put his mouth close and shouted. "Marilyn? You tell Ed when he gets home I don't want any wagon on Monday. Or any time."

Quickly he pushed down the receiver hook with a finger and waited again. After a moment he released the hook and cranked the handle once more and gave his number. He put his mouth close and shouted.

"Mrs. Calloway? You tell Herb I'll be there to see him shortly. Want to dicker for a couple of horses."

He pulled his old jacket closer about him and went out on his little back porch. He heard the telephone ringing behind him, three rings, his call.

"Let 'em keep that thing buzzing all day," he said. "I ain't got time to argue. Got my spring ploughing to do."

He went round the house and along the lane.

"That team Herb had here yesterday. The two of them together might do. Maybe buy back that cow too. She always gave down good for me."

Walking slowly and steadily, he headed up the road.

IF I HAD A WIFE

If I had a wife
I would love her as kings
Loved queens in the old days, or as princes
Maidens,
Met in the dew, by a stile, of a morning—
"How do you do, my pretty?"
And all of that.

If I had a wife
I would come home sometimes
Dressed like a stranger, and when she stared,
"Lady,"
I'd say, and woo her in wonder—
"How can there be such shining?"
And all of that.

If I had a wife
I would never be done
With remembering how it is now when, oh,
I am lonesome,
And no one is here but my dog and my cat—
"Well, old boys! Hungry?"
And all of that.

MARK VAN DOREN

CHAMPION

Mama was acting as if the sky had fallen
and she didn't know which way to run

BY FLORENCE McGEHEE

MY THREE UNCLES came to see us early in the morning. They seemed to know that Mama had been crying all night.

"Bless all here," said Uncle Hector, stooping to get in at the door.

"Bless this house," said Uncle Barry, stooping, too.

"Gesundheit!" said Uncle Neil, who thought he was funny.

They talked about Papa then, and their voices became loud while they turned red in the face. Uncle Hector mentioned tar and feathers and broken arms. Uncle Barry said he'd like to cut out his liver and feed it to the cat, if he could find a cat he hated enough. I didn't understand Uncle Neil's suggestion, but Mama did.

"Mind your words. The child is here," said Mama.

I was the child, and I stood in the doorway that separated our living quarters from the delicatessen. They all turned and looked at me. I was in my nightgown, my hair in curlpapers.

I knew I didn't look very attractive, and when my three uncles glowered at me, I began to fumble with the curlers, taking them off. No matter what calamity befell, Mama put up my hair in curlpapers every night of my life. It was a matter of pride with us.

Uncle Hector and Uncle Barry spoke together. "Good morning, Mary Eileen."

"Bless the little one," said Uncle Neil, and patted my head.

And I said, "Good morning," brushing my long red hair.

But they did not smile.

"A fine thing," said Uncle Hector, "letting the child go into a place like Joe Bagnioli's! What kind of a mother are you, Katie?"

"She was searching for her lost father," Mama said. "A natural thing for a young girl to do."

"She knew where to look," said Uncle Barry.

"Never mind about that," Mama said. "She wants him back. I want him, too."

"So do we. And the police," said Uncle Hector.

Mama flung her apron over her head and started keening.

"Ah now, Katie girl," said Uncle Neil, taking Mama into his arms and calling Uncle Hector a bad name. The others gathered closer then, seeking to comfort her too.

I slipped back into the bedroom, put on my clothes, brushed my teeth, dried what was left of my tears, and went to the kitchen to begin work on the potato salad.

It was one of the last things my father taught me before he disappeared. He got out all the utensils and ingredients, sighed heavily, and said that potato salad, to those who lived by bread alone, was as inevitable as taxes and death and that he'd rather be in hell with his back broke than see a pretty young thing like me doomed to a life that was bounded on the north, south, east, and west by the stuff.

Among our best customers were two college professors, a famous musician, three bankers, and other celebrities, besides a very wealthy woman who sent her coachman twice a week because our potato salad was much better than any she could get in the fancy places downtown. In fact, it was the best in the state.

"Forget him, Katie," I could hear my uncle Barry urge.

"Never!" Mama said. "Not while there's life for the living nor ground to bury the dead in!"

I was proud of her. When my mother spoke from the heart, there was never any doubt of what she meant. Of course she would not forget my father, and neither would I.

It was one of his premonitions, I felt sure, that was keeping him from us. He had them often, and they never failed him. There was the time an inner voice told him not to take the early-morning boat, saying insistently, "Not *this* one. *Wait.*" So he sat in the waiting-room for an hour until the next one came; and sure enough, a man fell off the earlier one and was drowned.

Papa was working for the Golden Rule Meat Packers at the time, and they fired him for being late. The boss said he could stand a premonition once in a while, but when they came in bunches, like predatory birds, something stank. Mama and I understood how it was though. It might have been Papa who drowned, and we thanked God it wasn't.

Then there was the time he refused to take a buggy ride with Matt Finnegan because of the negative clamour within him. The horse ran away, and the buggy was smashed to smithereens

when it hit a stone wall. Mr. Finnegan got a broken leg and collarbone, and the livery-stable man sued him for damages. Matt Finnegan had to admit, when it was all over, that Papa had been right.

Sometimes Papa would stay away from home because he had an inkling that something unpleasant was going to happen there—like creditors coming or the water's being turned off—and Papa could never stand anything unpleasant. His hunches never failed him.

My uncle Hector was talking now. "There's such a thing as constancy carried too far, my girl. Look—"

"It's constancy I was taught by my mother, the darling good woman, to whose bones be eternal rest," Mama said, her voice trembling.

"'Tis mighty early she drummed it in to you then," Uncle Neil said. "She died when you were four, Katie. That's why we—"

"Go along and get married, the lot of you!" Mama screamed. "Make some other women miserable, and leave me to my sorrow. It wasn't three nosy brothers I ever asked for!"

"We are here to guide and guard, to protect and defend you, to preserve your honour—"

"I'll preserve my own honour!"

"And as long as God's in His bright and holy heaven—"

"Oh, shut up!" Mama said.

"And as for that vanishing spouse of yours— How many times is this now, Katie? Three? Four?" It was Uncle Neil asking.

"Five," said Mama, sounding more subdued and kind of guilty.

"Five!" cried all three uncles, as though they hadn't known.

"Yes, five. But there were reasons and—"

"'Reasons,' she says. Reasons for leaving his beautiful young wife cold in her bed; for discarding the fruit of his loins, the poor little lost lamb, alone and friendless and hungry, with no—"

"She's not hungry," said Mama. "Not with nine pancakes for breakfast, with mush and fried potatoes and a dill pickle or two."

"—one to care for her, and a neglectful mother who permits her to frequent places like Joe Bagnioli's when—"

"Shut up!" my mother screamed again, as Uncle Barry was getting really wound up.

The outer door opened, its little bell tinkling. It meant our first customer of the day.

"Oh, good morning, Mr. Grimshaw," Mama said, her voice as soft as kitten fur.

The uncles wished Mr. Grimshaw a good morning, too, tipped their hats, said, "Good-bye, Katie;" "Remember, Katie;" "God love you, Katie," and went away.

As I got ready for school, I could hear Mama advertising that we had some lovely fresh yeast biscuits this morning and Mr. Grimshaw replying that Mama's pretty white hands were like little plump white biscuits themselves, warm and comforting, and that if he were twenty years younger— This was rather silly, but he was a very good customer, coming in every day and spending lavishly.

Besides, most of the gentlemen who bought our delicacies said complimentary things to Mama about her eyes or her form or her lovely hands. We were used to it.

There were two buttons I couldn't reach in the back of my dress. I let them go, as it would have been rude to interrupt when a customer was in the store. I couldn't make my hair ribbon stand up in the perky way I wanted it to, and when I put on my shoes I felt guilty because I had forgotten to shine them the night before. I got my sheet music off the piano: *Romances sans Paroles*, *The Scarf Dance*, and Beethoven's Sonata in C—because this was my lesson day, and I always went to it straight from school, so as to get back home in time to help in the evening rush at the shop.

When I passed Bagnioli's, I thought I might as well look in, just in case. Papa had been there before and I knew it, though my mother and even my three uncles spoke vaguely of Papa's "weakness" when I was around. He wasn't weak: he was handsome and tall and vigorous, and he had a free, untrammelled spirit. It was too early for custom in Bagnioli's; there was only Joe himself, wiping the bar with a wet rag.

"Good morning, Mary Eileen," he said when he looked up and saw me. And then, "No, dearie. Nothing doing. Run along to school now, poor child."

I certainly didn't intend to stay. The place smelt sourly of stale beer, and I hated being called "poor child," too.

The day was a bad one. As usual, I won the spelling match, this time with "prestidigitator," after three others had missed it, and though Miss Muldoon gave me two gold stars—one for the one she had forgotten the day before—I didn't feel triumphant. My heart was heavy. I missed several problems in arithmetic and at playtime fell and skinned my knee.

All day long I kept thinking about my father's disappearance, worried because what my uncles said was true; he was wanted by the police. He had hit the mayor's cousin in an argument over William of Orange, and this was assault and battery. The

mayor's cousin belonged to the Brotherhood, and so did my three uncles. Papa did not belong, so my uncles thought he was in the wrong.

Even my music, which usually soothed me, didn't this day, though Professor Wagner complimented me and gave me an elegant new crossed-hands piece. As soon as the lesson was over the professor wrote a list of what he wanted at the delicatessen because, of course, we could not afford to pay cash, and it was only in this way that we got many of the finer things in life, like hiring a horse and buggy from the livery stable now and then.

I ran all the way home, hoping my father would be there; it was four days now, and he had never stayed away more than three. I wondered, too, what kind of gift he would bring this time, because he always had something wonderful for Mama when he returned from wherever it was his premonitions took him. Once there was a pair of Chinese zebra wrens, loving each other in a golden cage. Then there was a huge cut-glass punch bowl with forty-seven cups, all edged in silver. Another time he brought Mama a Turkish costume, with seven veils in shades of scarlet and purple. Before that I had been too young to notice what the gifts were; but there was always something kind of foreign about them. It was as if Papa had just returned from far across the sea, when really he'd been only as far as Alameda or Crockett or Sausalito.

Though Mama would have been frantic with worry, she never chided him; she just fell into his arms, weeping and saying how glad she was to have him back. She felt lucky, I could tell, to be married to Papa who was handsome and gifted and a good conversationalist.

But Mama was all these things, too, even if she didn't seem to know it. She had long red hair that didn't need curlers and eyes that were so blue they were almost violet. No matter how much her hands were in brine or hot water, her skin was like cream; and she had a good form, with a high bosom and a pinched-in waist.

Suddenly, I was surprised that I had not noticed these things before. I hadn't, because she was my mother, a whole eighteen years older than I, and she had always taken care of me; I needed her, and that was all there was to it.

Now I felt sad and kind of worried, too, because it seemed as if something was being wasted. I wished Mama could have had premonitions that took her to nice places where there were Chinese zebra wrens and potted magnolias. Only, I would have wanted to go, too, and I guess that wouldn't have been very romantic.

My three uncles were in the delicatessen, lounging against the counter.

"The mayor's cousin has decided to drop the charges," said Uncle Hector.

"He says he has searched his conscience about making a beautiful lady with her little one the widow of a gaolbird," said Uncle Barry.

"He says that this blessed country was founded on religious freedom and that it is every man's privilege to think whatever he likes about a cowardly dastard like William of Orange," Uncle Neil told us.

"He was drunk!" Mama said.

"Sober as a judge," Uncle Hector said.

"Soberer than most," Uncle Barry said, "considering the rotgut currently favoured by the municipal bench."

Uncle Neil said, "He was being charitable, Katie dear. He was forgiving your husband."

"He needn't bother," said Mama. "If there's any forgiving to do, I'll do it myself, and the mayor's cousin may shinny up a lamp-post. Tell him I said so."

I was relieved, though. Papa did not need to be a fugitive from justice any more. If he continued to stay away, it was only because of his weakness.

"Too bad you married a man who's not one of our own," Uncle Hector said. "Peabody! What kind of a name is that for a sturdy Irish girl?"

"A proud name, if you read your history," Mama said. "And if I make no mistake, Mr. Fixit, it was you yourself so anxious to see that I got it. It was you yourself and no other who asked Jack the honour of his intentions and showed him the shortest route to the church."

"You were over young, Katie. And tender."

"Over loving, too," said Uncle Barry. "Remember that Saturday night on the corner with the street lamp out."

"And knowing nothing of the carnal nature of man," Uncle Neil hastened to say.

The uncles came again the next morning right after breakfast.

"Hear anything, Katie?" Uncle Hector asked, before he even said, "bless all here."

"Only the lonely beating of my heart," said Mama, beginning to cry.

"If you're lonely, Katie girl," Uncle Neil began, "we—"

"If I'm lonely! If! You hear that, Mary Eileen? These three dried-up bachelors want to know if I'm lonely. They

want to know if you, little one, feel the loss of your devoted father, who—"

" ' Devoted,' she says," said Uncle Barry.

I began to cry, too.

The uncles looked from one to the other of us and began to swear softly and earnestly.

" Since you're lonely," Uncle Neil said, " we could do something about it. Take you somewhere."

" Oh, sure! " Mama said. " I could go stravaging around the streets like a common strumpet! "

" But with your own brothers, Katie girl."

" With my own brothers—and advertise to the world that I have no man of my own to squire me here and there? "

" Face it, Katie."

" And that in my great sadness— Face what? "

" Never mind," Uncle Hector said. " Now, listen, Katie. The Brotherhood is having a ball Saturday and—"

" We'll take you," said Uncle Barry.

" We'll be glad to," Uncle Neil said.

" And why haven't you dates of your own? " Mama wanted to know.

" The devil's teeth! " said Uncle Hector. " There she goes again! "

" There aren't any girls we care to—" Uncle Neil began.

Uncle Barry said that so far he had skilfully avoided entangling alliances with females, and thus his life was clean and uncomplicated. He proposed to keep it that way. All he had to do was look around him and see what marriage was like to become completely discouraged with the idea of ever entering into such a state.

Uncle Neil patted Mama on the shoulder and told her she should get something besides toil and trouble into her daily living. " Come to the ball, Katie. You'll have a good time."

" I haven't a thing to wear," Mama said.

The uncles looked at one another as though they had won something and went away, saying, " Think it over, Katie; " " God love you, Katie, and the little one, too; " " Cherish your grievance, Katie."

When I looked in at Joe Bagnioli's on the way to school, there was nobody in the bar, but there were voices outside. I thought I'd better wait a minute. While I never asked a question about my father, Mr. Bagnioli always gave me an answer, so that I could go away sure, one way or another.

There was a piano in a dim corner. I had heard it now and then when I passed by and someone was playing a tune in the

plunkety-plunkety way people do in bars: *My Sweetheart's the Man in the Moon*, *After the Ball*, or *Break the News to Mother*. I was tempted to touch it, and finally I did. At first, I just put one finger on middle C, and then I struck a chord very softly. The piano was in perfect tune, and that surprised me because ours never was, until I remembered that Joe Bagnioli was Italian and wouldn't have been caught dead with any off-key music around. The action was good, too, and I slid on to the stool and played a few bars of my new crossed-hands piece. Then I tried something from *Chaminade*; it sounded so good I forgot everything else, and I must have played for quite a long time.

There wasn't a sound in the room; but after a while, I knew I was not alone—you know, the way you feel when somebody is looking at the back of your head. I stopped playing, and it was then that I heard two voices, whispering.

One of them said, "Well, I'll be damned."

And the other, "Imagine! A child like that!"

I whirled round, remembering that I was in Joe Bagnioli's saloon. I was ashamed and embarrassed and a little afraid, too, of what my uncles would say when they found out. They always found out everything I did and blamed Mama for it.

Joe Bagnioli said, out of the dimness, "That was beautiful, Mary Eileen. You're a talented girl."

He was followed by a stranger, a tall man, who complimented me, too, saying I had given him great pleasure, that he dearly loved music, and that if he could ever do anything to repay me, I was just to let him know.

"This is Mary Eileen Peabody, Jim," Joe Bagnioli said. "She's the daughter of Katie McManus."

"Katie McManus!" the strange man almost shouted. "Well now, you don't say. Little Katie McManus, hey? The prettiest girl in Hayes Valley!" The stranger shook my hand, saying, "Congratulations."

I thought I had better get out of there, so I looked my quick question at Joe, who shook his head and said, "You'll be late for school, dearie."

I was.

Miss Muldoon reproved me, and later when she gave me the gold star for winning the spelling match—this time it was for "grandiloquence"—she looked as though she was getting a little tired of this and wished somebody else would win. If she had known how much it meant to me to win, she wouldn't have been this way. My music and being the best in spelling were all I had to make me happy since my father's disappearance.

I still felt good about the compliments on my piano playing

that morning. Joe Bagnioli and his friend had acted as though I had done something especially fine. Joe Bagnioli hadn't done a very good job of introducing the stranger. All I knew was that his name was Jim, but he must have lived in the city a long time ago and just come back for a visit.

I kept remembering his polite speech about doing something to repay me; but even if he meant it as more than just courtesy, there was nothing I wanted except my father home and my mother happy again. Nobody could do anything about that. Our problem was in the hands of God, who would guide Papa home when his premonition or his weakness—whichever it was this time—had released its hold on him. I prayed hard every night about this, even with the linoleum icy cold under my knees.

It was strange, but if anything unusual or exciting happened to us while Papa was away, he always seemed to know about it, hurrying back immediately. How this could be I didn't know, but Mama said it was because my father was fey and could see into the Beyond.

I saw the man called Jim several times on my way to and from school. He seemed to be very popular and always had a little crowd of men around him, listening to him talk and laughing at everything he said. He always waved and said, "Good morning, Mary Eileen. A pleasant day to you."

We went to the Brotherhood Ball because the uncles practically dragged us there. Mama wore her old black velvet that showed how white her shoulders were and the long swinging earrings Papa had given her for Christmas. I had on my best green dress, which was getting a little short but was extremely becoming.

The hall was jammed, even though we got there early. While Mama greeted her friends, I sat on a bench along the wall with some other girls and watched people coming in.

My uncles joined the stag line, standing in a row with their hands in their pockets, and I noticed how all the women looked at them—three tall men with fiery-red hair and moustaches, strong straight noses, all wearing check suits and high white collars. It struck me for the first time that they were very handsome, as I heard an old woman near me murmur to another, "The McManus brothers, Hector, Barry, and Cornelius, all unwed and fleet of foot."

I saw Mama in a far corner, half smiling but looking a little nervous and alone. I was about to go to her when there was a commotion near the door. A lot of handshaking and backslapping was going on. It was Joe Bagnioli's friend who had come in, gay and joking as usual. He was alone. Suddenly I thought of

something he could do to repay me for the pleasure my music had given him.

I pushed through the crowd, and when I came close to him, he turned to speak to me. He was very cordial, so I drew him aside and whispered what it was I wanted. He said he'd be delighted, and I went back to my seat along the wall.

There came a roll of snare drums and a loud boom from the bass, and the big noisy hall was suddenly still. The floor manager held up a hand for attention. Then he thanked all the people for coming and told them what a good cause they had spent their hard-earned dollars for, mentioning so many good deeds of the Brotherhood that everybody began to look droopy. At last he said, "And now, ladies and gentlemen, the grand march this evening will be led by the ablest of our own, a native of San Francisco, a Hayes Valley boy, a great man, the terror of Kilrain, the nemesis of Peter Jackson, victor over John L. Sullivan, the champion of the world, Gentleman Jim Corbett!"

When the yelling and stamping and hand clapping had died down, he went on, "And his partner, the lovely and popular Katie McManus!"

This startled me a little. After all, Mama's name was Mrs. Peabody. There was more yelling and whistling, and I saw my three uncles looking as if they had been struck by lightning. Then their heads swivelled from where Mr. Corbett was taking Mama's hand to where I was sitting quietly in my corner. Mama looked stunned, too, but not at all angry. The band struck up a stirring march, and the wallflowers looked appealingly at the stags, who looked bored.

I couldn't move. I couldn't even breathe. If I had had any idea who Joe Bagnioli's friend was, I wouldn't have dared!

As my uncles came towards me, one of them was saying, "I saw her speak to him." They looked stern.

"Mary Eileen," Uncle Hector began.

"He's a friend of mine," I said quickly.

"Who?"

"Mr. Corbett."

"He's a friend of hers," Uncle Hector said to Uncle Barry.

"The champion of the world. He's a friend of hers," Uncle Neil said. He thought he was funny.

"Where'd you meet him?" Uncle Hector wanted to know.

"In Joe Bagnioli's."

"She met the champion of the world in Joe Bagnioli's," Uncle Barry said.

"One of her old haunts," Uncle Neil said.

Just then, Mama and Gentleman Jim passed by, my mother

looking queenly and beautiful in her old black velvet and the champion of the world smiling and proud, with all the less handsome people marching along behind them.

All at once, I was not afraid any more. I was good and mad. I stood up as straight as I could, smoothing down my too-short skirt, remembering some words of one of my uncles. I told them, "Mama needs something in her life besides toil and trouble—and potato salad!"

They all looked at my mother, and I could see them swallowing hard. Then Uncle Hector said, "She's right. As God is in His bright and holy heaven, she's right!"

"She is that," said Uncle Barry. "I hope Jack hears of this. Bless the child."

Uncle Neil said, "Mary Eileen, sometimes you scare me."

They went away then, relaxed and grinning, to join the stag line again, paying no attention to the pretty girls who looked at them invitingly.

After the grand march there was a good deal of laughter and milling around, with newspaper reporters asking questions and photographers taking pictures. They even talked to me, because I was the daughter of Katie McManus. Tomorrow it would be in all the papers that Gentlemen Jim Corbett, world heavyweight champion, had led the grand march at the Brotherhood Ball with pretty Mrs. Peabody, an old school chum and Hayes Valley resident. The whole world would be reading it. I hoped it would bring Papa home.

Mama danced every dance, each with a different partner, just as if she wasn't an old married woman but still the prettiest girl in Hayes Valley. She seemed surprised to find out that she could have a good time.

Later in the evening, Mr. Corbett invited her to be his partner for the varsovienne. While they were swooping about and pointing their toes elegantly, I happened to glance towards the stag line, and there was my father! He must have been home, because he was wearing his best Sunday-go-to-meeting suit and his moustache was freshly waxed. His eyes were only a little bloodshot. I started to run to him, but stopped because he had a deadly look about him that I had never seen before.

Joe Bagnioli was hanging on to his coat-tail and saying, "No, Jack, no! Come on, let's go home."

"Let me alone!" my father said, flinging Joe off.

"But, Jack! Not *this* one! You don't know who he is!"

"I don't give a hoot if he's Goliath!" Papa roared. He rushed on to the dance floor, both arms swinging, and caught Mr. Corbett a glancing blow on the elbow.

Gentleman Jim looked astonished, but didn't do anything, just fended off a second blow, laughed a little, and said, " Hey, what's this? "

The dancing stopped, and the music petered out as four strong men fell upon Papa and hustled him away, with Mr. Corbett yelling, " Aw, it's all right, boys," and Mama acting as if the sky had fallen and she didn't know which way to run. It seemed as if I'd been holding my breath for an hour. I exhaled now; the champion of the world wasn't going to fight my father.

While my father struggled, the men looked at him in awe and admiration. " The lad's touched," said one.

" Completely mazed! " said another.

" It must be the grog in him," somebody else said.

Uncle Hector looked wonderingly at his brothers and whispered, " He hit him! He hit Jim Corbett! "

Uncle Barry, whispering, too, said, " Holy Mother! The champion of the world, and Jack Peabody took a poke at him! "

" In defence of his woman," Uncle Neil said, " the wife of his bosom."

" Well, I'll be a monkey's uncle! " the mayor's cousin said. " It makes my own shame less. Let me shake the hand that took a swipe at the heavyweight champion of the world! Only next time, Jack, lead with your left and—"

" Stow it! " my father said, shaking himself loose and striding away. As he passed the bandstand, he shouted, " *Little Sally Waters*," and the musicians accommodatingly swung into that tune. Papa made an elaborate dancing-school sort of bow to Mama, and they fell into step together to

Little Sally Waters, sitting in the sun,
Crying and weeping for her young man,
Rise, Sally, rise, wipe your eye out with your frock.
Is sung by all the babies that are living on our block.

I had never before seen my parents dancing and being so happy together. It was so beautiful I almost cried.

Suddenly everybody in the big hall was roaring out the old song.

There's the Brannons and the Gannons,
Far down and Connaught men,
Quite easy with the shovel
And so handy with the pen;
All royal blood and noble
From Dan O'Connell's stock,
Singing Little Sally Waters with the babies on our block!

During the singing, Papa and Mama had danced right out of

the front door and into the street. They walked along towards home with their arms around each other.

In a minute I followed, but not before my uncle Hector said, " Walk in the footsteps of your good parents."

" Bless the sweet young girl," said Uncle Barry.

" Read good books and keep good company," said Uncle Neil, who thought he was funny.

Joe Bagnioli, holding my wrap for me at the door, gazed out into the darkness and said, " They're crazy."

" Who? "

" Men and women."

I walked half a block behind Mama and Papa, a little sad because they had forgotten me for a while. But my heart lifted when we came to our place, because there, hanging at the doorway, was a cluster of camel bells attached to a long crimson rope, and they were making a lovely sound in the wind from the bay.

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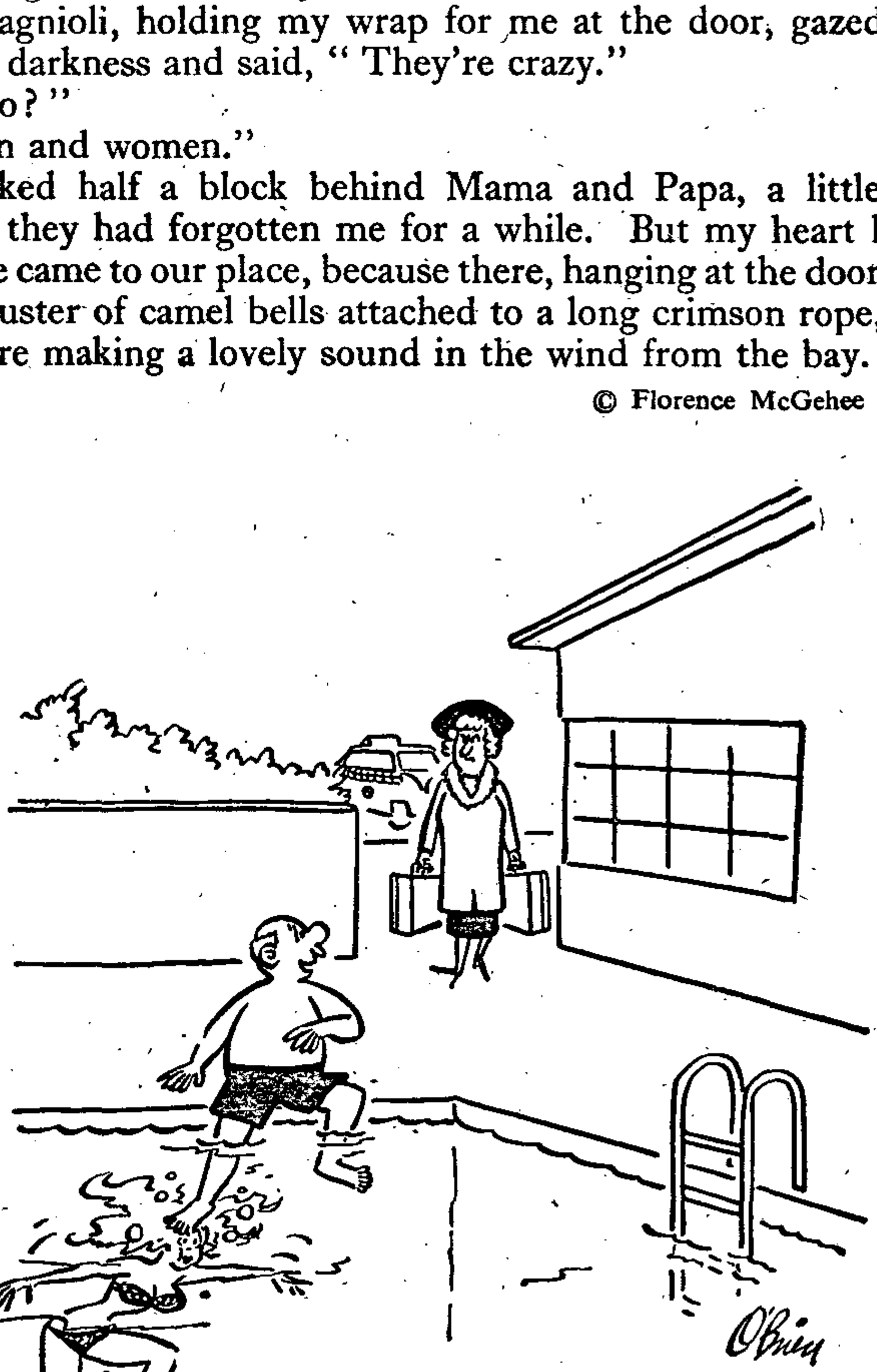

" Why, Martha, I didn't expect you home until Thursday! "

HOW TO NAME A DOG

BY JAMES THURBER

EDITORS believe that I am somehow an expert in the naming of dogs. I think they may have read a piece I wrote a few years ago in which I said I had owned, in my time, some forty dogs. This is true, but deceptive. Twenty-seven of the dogs I owned were puppies, and they were sold, or given away, unnamed. I left naming them to the new owners.

I must digress a moment from my general theme, since the matter has come up, and warn inexperienced owners of puppies never to give them away. Sell them or keep them, but don't give them away. Sixty per cent of persons who are given a dog for nothing bring him back sooner or later and plump him into the reluctant and unprepared lap of his former owner.

The people say that they are going to Florida and can't take the dog, or that he doesn't want to go; or they point out that he eats first editions or lace curtains or spinets, or that he doesn't see eye to eye with them in the matter of housebreaking, or that he makes disparaging remarks under his breath about their friends. Anyway, they bring him back and you are stuck with him—and maybe six others. But if you charge ten or even five dollars for a pup, the new owner doesn't dare bring him back.

Names of dogs have a range almost as wide as that of a violin. They run from such plain and simple names as Spot, Sport, Rex, Brownie, and Rover—all originated by small boys—to such effete and fancy appellations as Prince Rudolph Hertenberg Gratzhein of Darndorf-Putzelhorst, and Darling Mist o' Love III of Heather-Light-Holyrood—names originated by adults, all of whom in every other way, I am told, have made a normal adjustment to life.

In addition to the plain and the fancy categories, there are the Cynical and the Coy. Cynical names are given by people who do not like dogs enough, coy names by people who like dogs too much . . .

The great Coy category is perhaps the largest. The coy people call their pets Bubbles and Boggles and Sparkles and Twinkles and Doodles and Puffy and Lovums and Sweetums and Itsy-Bitsy and Betsy-Bye-Bye and Sugarkins. I pass these dog owners at a dogtrot, wearing a horrible fixed grin.

There is a special subdivision of the Coys, who are not quite so awful, but awful enough. These people, whom we will call the Wits, own two dogs, which they name Pitter and Patter, Willy and Nilly, Helter and Skelter, Pro and Con, Namby and Pamby, Hugger and Mugger, Hokery and Pokery, and even Wishy and Washy, and Ups and Daisy.

Then there is the Cryptic category. These people name their dogs for some vague reason or for no reason at all—except perhaps to arouse the visitor's curiosity, so that he will exclaim, "Why in the world do you call your dog *that*?" The Cryptics name their dogs October, Bennett's Aunt, Three Fifteen, Doc Knows, Tuesday, Home Fried, Opus 38, Ask Leslie, and Walter S. Bursley. I make it a point simply to pat these unfortunate dogs on the head, ask no questions, and go about my business.

This article has degenerated into a piece that properly should be entitled *How Not To Name a Dog.* I was afraid it would. It seems only fair to make up for this by confessing a few of the names I have given my own dogs, with the considerable help, if not, indeed, the insistence, of their mistress. Most of my dogs have been females, and they have answered, with apparent gladness, to such names as Jeannie, Tessa, Julie, and Sophie. I am opposed—and I think dogs are also—to Ida, Cora, Blanche, and Myrtle . . .

I have heard of four dogs named Thurber and have met one of them, a spaniel belonging to Mr. and Mrs. Phil Stong. We got along all right, and he did not seem any more depressed than spaniels usually do. Thurber is supposed to look like the dog I draw, a troubled, thoughtful dog with an air of insecurity. When I am asked his name, I say that it is Pierre Gustave Toutant Beauregard. This famous Confederate general liked, trusted, and gave information to James Andrews, the Northern spy. Beauregard thought Andrews was a loyal Southern patriot. I think the dog I draw once had a similar experience and has never quit brooding about it.

CRIME FANS!

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EVERY MONTH 2'6

MR. PAN

He ordered black dragons with gold tongues
to be embroidered on a coat of vermilion

BY KRESSMAN TAYLOR

MR. PAN was a man who died every day. Mr. Pan lived near the wall of the city in a small house with a red lacquered gate and a door set with tiles tinted blue like shallow water, on which were enamelled patterns of flowering rice and of water reeds. In the garden were a clump of pale green bamboos and a dark green banana tree. A pretty goldfish pool lay in the shade of the bamboos, a pool with a rim of light green tile decorated in patterns of plum blossom and displaying the six characters of an ancient poem:

When no foot approaches,
The plum blossom is without fragrance.

Within the house were clean straw mats, two carved chairs, and six delicate blue-and-white teacups.

Yet every day Mr. Pan died in a most anguishing manner. When he arose in the morning and knelt before the basin to wash his face in clear water, he pondered that, being weak without his breakfast, he was almost certainly about to faint, and he saw how his body would slide forward and his face drop in the wide basin and he would be dead of suffocation before a neighbour should come in to discover him.

Indeed, it might be a day or two before he was discovered, and in the meantime his body would turn blue and the ants would crawl over it, so that the neighbour, entering in a friendly and carefree manner, would discover a most horrid sight. Upon this reflection, Mr. Pan would rise from his knees and open the window before he washed, so that a passerby might notice the trouble within.

When Mr. Pan dressed and a loose thread from the seam of his trousers tickled his skin, he would seize with two fingers a bit of the cloth of the garment and, quivering, pull it away from his flesh while he waited for the sting of the poisonous spider or scorpion which had crawled into the snug folds of the cotton during the night.

Sometimes when he had been working with his hands, Mr. Pan would discover upon his palm a bit of loose skin from a blister or callus, and he would try it tremulously with a finger-nail and find it without sensation. Then the hand of fear would squeeze his heart, for lack of sensation is the telltale sign of leprosy, and he would imagine that he was infected and that he must leave his pretty house and wander among hedgerows, shunned by men. He would feel the bite of the frost and see the remote and compassionless glitter of the night stars out of a black sky, and would twist his rags about him against the wind.

When he walked in the street and saw a flagpole with a pennon or a lantern blowing gently at its tip, he would become the climber who had set the bit of paper there, and he would feel his hands slip on the smooth pole and his knees fail to grip, and he would plummet awfully through space, his hands clutching at the yielding air, and hear the crunch of his bones on the packed earth.

When the kettle boiled for his tea, he would tremble lest the brazier tip upon the mat and the walls flame up and he run screaming from his house with his hair afire. When the house creaked in the night, he lost his courage, dreaming that a thief drew near among the shadows, with bared knife.

Even when he stood in clear sunlight in his peaceful garden and looked out beyond the city walls at the hills that were blue as rare porcelain, with here and there the square of a field or the red dot of a house, he would remember that in times past this had been volcanic country, and he would feel the molten river creeping beneath the earth at his feet and hear the consuming roar of the eruption.

One morning it happened that Mr. Pan upon awakening coughed three times. Now he realised at last that he had caught a deadly disease, and when he had washed, and brewed his tea, he crawled back into his bed, for the terrible lassitude in his body told him that he must now count as loss each rising of the sun over the earth's rim.

During the restless day he coughed three more times; whereupon he dragged himself feebly from his pallet and made a poultice of banana leaves for his chest.

In the still, late afternoon, when the breeze no longer stirred the leaves of the bamboo in the garden, footsteps sounded on the stones outside, and a messenger appeared in the doorway to tell Mr. Pan that his only sister, who lived in another city a day's journey distant, believed herself to be dying and wished to see her brother before her eyes closed for the last time.

"Alas," said Mr. Pan, "I too am dying. I am far wasted with the blood-spitting disease and will not many times see the sun rise to warm the earth. Tell my sister that we shall enter the Great Void together."

Five days later on a morning golden with sun, when Mr. Pan had recovered from the disease, the messenger appeared again and informed him that his sister was dead. Now Mr. Pan was filled with shock and his knees actually grew weak, for he had not really envisioned his sister dying. His eyes filled with tears, and he went to the clothes chest and took out a white mourning garment and put it on and fastened at his waist a purse full of money for travelling. Thus he accompanied the messenger to his sister's house.

When the funeral rites were accomplished and the last shred of devilpaper had blown away on the wind, Mr. Pan came back with the family to his sister's house, and there for the first time he took note of his sister's three small children, sitting sad-eyed by the door in their wadded coats. There were two little girls and a very small boy. The children's faces were smudged and their black eyes trembled with tears, but they were bravely attempting not to cry.

"Let your tears fall," Mr. Pan told them. "The tears of sorrow water the flower of memory."

As the words came from his mouth, Mr. Pan found somewhere tucked away in his mind, the remembered face of his sister, lovely as a plum blossom.

Mr. Pan's brother-in-law had died two years before. His sister had not married into a fortunate house, and the two old parents had no more than enough silver to fill their stomachs with rice and to warm the dark little house, which opened only upon the public street.

"Let the children come to live with me," said Mr. Pan. "When the young plant sprouts it must be watered and set in the sun." And he remembered the golden light of the sun that filled his garden.

The little girls were named White Almond Flower and Little Willow Tree; the name of the boy was Virtue of Tranquillity. During the journey their eyes were shy and their lips did not open. For a week they were shy, and then it seemed to them that the morning light which turned the windowframe rosy had always shone on them through this same window, and they were at home and became noisy.

Virtue of Tranquillity brought to his uncle a splintered shoot of the bamboo which he had broken off, and White Almond

Flower came crying, for she had fallen and cut her knee on the shattered stalk.

Mr. Pan washed the knee, which was round and sweet as a yellow peach, and put on it a clean strip of white cloth as a bandage. "This time you must *not* cry," he told her. "The body of a woman will keep the scars of many pains her mind has forgotten."

At the same time he saw on his own arm two small scars whose source he could not recall. "The bamboo climbs swiftly up the lines of the sunlight," he told his nephew. "Let us permit it to grow as it wishes."

The two little girls emptied a bowl of tea into the goldfish pool, and the goldfish died. The boy took a stone from the path and scratched a crosshatched pattern on the red lacquer of the gate. Poor little ones, thought Mr. Pan, they have never seen beautiful shapes and do not know how to regard them; and he made them a boat of green-and-silver paper to float on the rainwater tub.

When a nobleman's carriage passed, he took the children into the street to watch the horses. The manes were plaited and tied with golden threads from which tiny bells of gold and silver hung and tinkled. The horses bowed their wide necks in moving arches, and their gilded hoofs lifted high and trod down firmly.

In her tenth summer Little Willow Tree was bitten on the foot by a serpent. Mr. Pan cut the flesh with the steel edge of a knife and sucked the wound, pressing his lips against the ivory instep.

He bathed the wound in cold tea and made a poultice, and as he held the poultice securely to the slender arched foot, Little Willow Tree looked at him trustfully. Mr. Pan felt frightened that he had not done enough, and he examined the firm flesh of the leg to see whether it was swelling or turning colour; but immediately he noticed that the poultice had grown warm, and he hurried to make a fresh one.

In that same summer, in the month when the herons come to the river banks, Mr. Pan decided that the children were to be taught to read and write; not the boy only, but the girls as well. Accordingly he paid two pieces of silver from the chest to an indigent scholar, who taught the children for an hour every morning when the grass in the garden was bright with dew and the shadows of the bamboo were long.

When the children quarrelled over their games in the evening, Mr. Pan steeped a steaming bowl and persuaded the three to join him in a circle to drink tea from the blue-and-white cups and

recite poems. They recited many old poems and some newer ones:

The present is the palm of your hand.
The future is a mirror
Standing at the back of your mind.

Listen to the voice of the pine needles
When the wind is still.

Do not have hope, do not have fear,
For neither one is able to hear the frogs calling
From the green pool among the rushes
As dusk clouds the water.

Sometimes the boy recited the poem from the rim of the goldfish pool.

White Almond Blossom had a face shaped to a perfect oval, and when she was fifteen years old she was as lovely as the sickle moon in a mist. Mr. Pan found for her a husband from an honourable family and gave for her dowry sixteen pieces of silver and a bolt of yellow silk.

Little Willow Tree had a snub face like a little round pan and smiling eyes which made the observer smile in return. Her uncle arranged her engagement to a likeable young man, the eldest son of an official; and when the season of autumn fires had come and the wedding was celebrated, her dower was eighteen pieces of silver and a silk coverlet of cutwork pattern embroidered with butterflies and willow branches.

Now it was the boy's turn. Mr. Pan questioned his nephew and learnt that Virtue of Tranquillity, the youth of the thoughtful eyes, aspired to become a scholar. Mr. Pan burnt incense in the Lion Temple in gratitude for the honour to be visited upon his house by the boy's ambition. He ordered a fine padded coat to be made for the youth, of vermilion cloth, and desired black dragons with gold tongues to be embroidered on the sleeves.

On the windy morning in spring when the boy was to set out for the capital to begin his studies, Mr. Pan made him a present of a scroll and writing brushes. He put into his nephew's hand a purse in which he had placed forty pieces of silver from the chest, leaving for himself only five, and he embraced Virtue of Tranquillity tenderly, exhorting him to remember the family name and bring lustre to it.

Mr. Pan stood in the gateway and watched the bright coat move down the street until crowds of many people obscured it. He turned to walk back into his garden. He saw that the red

lacquer gate was marked and marred, many stalks of the bamboo were broken and lay this way and that among the green stems, the goldfish pool was empty of life, and most of the rich grass of the garden had been trampled to death, so that many patches were bare and the earth baked. From under a low-spreading leaf of the banana tree peeked a fragment of blue-and-white teacup, broken once by Little Willow Tree during the washing up.

Mr. Pan walked down the garden, and the playful wind lifted his cap from his head and dropped it into the pool, where it floated on the shallow water. He bent, picked it up, shaking the water drops from it, and without considering whether the cold and dampness might be bad for him, placed it on his head.

Mr. Pan smiled. He was poorer than he had ever deemed possible; his inheritance and his own earnings were exhausted except for five silver pieces, but he was sound of body and tranquillity dwelt in his breast. He looked out. He looked out beyond the city walls at the hills, which were blue as rare porcelain, with here and there the square of a field or the red dot of a house. Mr. Pan drew in a full breath of the strong spring breeze, and his nostrils expanded and he smiled once more, and the scent of plum blossoms came drifting down to him upon the fragrant wind.

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SOLUTIONS to STEAL A MARCH on page 27

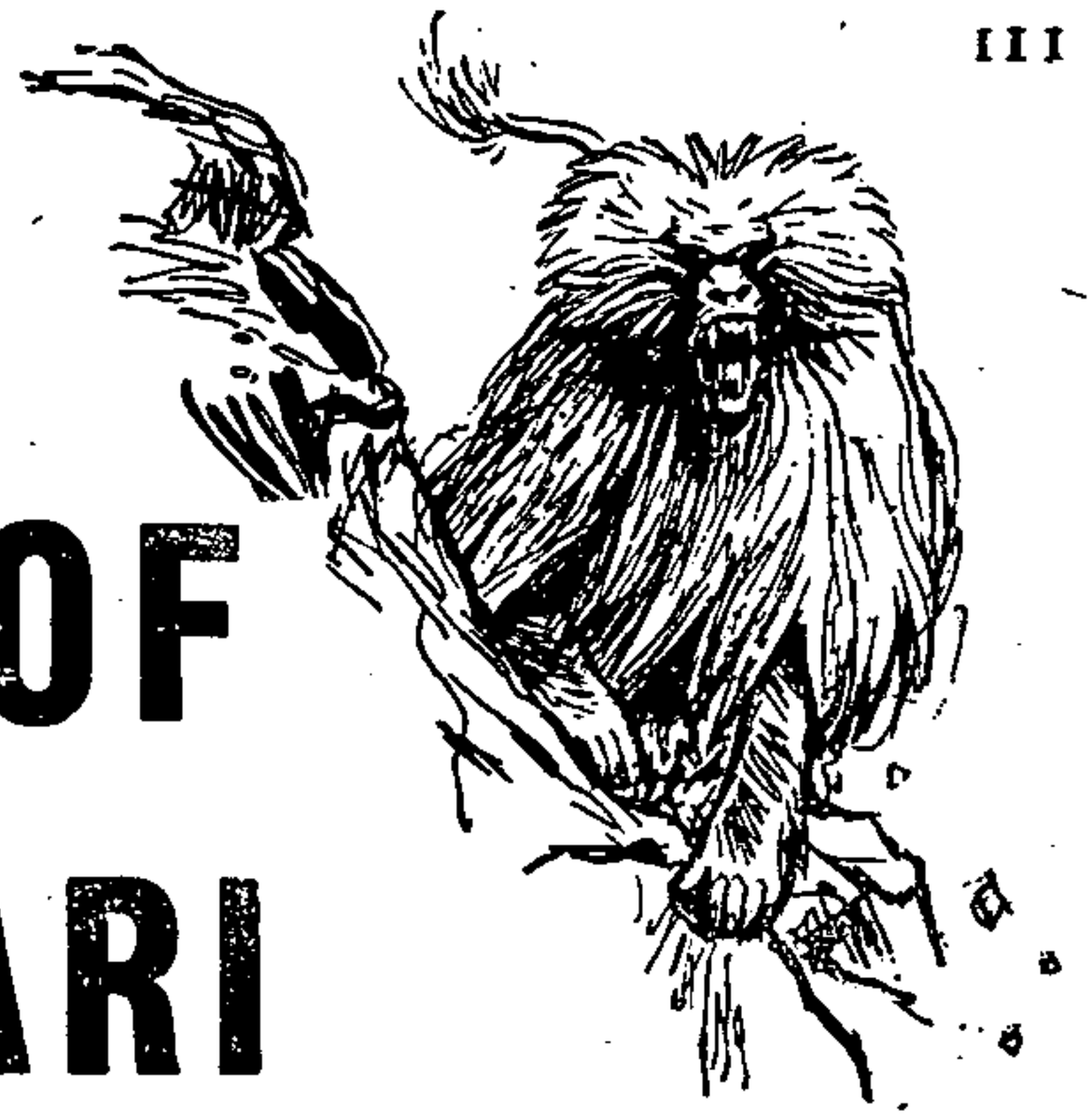
1. *15th of March, May, July, October; 13th of the other months.*
2. *March is mating season for hares.*
3. *Marzipan, trout fly.*
4. *To go bankrupt.*
5. *Border territories.*
6. *a. Masefield; b. Whittier; c. Browning.*
7. *The Grand Old Duke of York.*
8. *a. Elgar; b. Handel; c. Schubert; d. Sousa.*

SOLUTION to ARGOSY CROSSWORD on page 144

Across. 1, *Marsupial.* 9, *Manila.* 10, *Ambleside.* 11, *Rabies.* 12, *Furniture.* 13, *Argaum.* 17, *Gas.* 19, *Average.* 20, *Topical.* 21, *May.* 23, *Dibber.* 27, *Maladroit.* 28, *Lethal.* 29, *Miniature.* 30, *Sunset.* 31, *Peregrine.*

Down. 2, *Armour.* 3, *Splint.* 4, *Peseta.* 5, *Andorra.* 6, *Paragraph.* 7, *Vigilance.* 8, *Facsimile.* 14, *Handclasp.* 15, *Kerbstone.* 16, *Barefaced.* 17, *Gem.* 18, *Sty.* 22, *Avarice.* 24, *Valise.* 25, *Crater.* 26, *Citron.*

THE SANDS OF KALAHARI



by
WILLIAM
MULVIHILL

The black fingers of the mountain range splayed out into the arid waste of the Great Desert—the Thirstland, and somewhere among them lay the canyon that sheltered the six survivors of the plane crash. Suddenly the desert had become a powerful enemy in their struggle for survival. Sturdevant, owner and charter pilot of the plane, in a desperate bid to seek help had set out alone into the Kalahari. Grimmelmann, the old German wise in desert lore, had searched for food and water, helped by Jefferson Smith, the young Negro professor, by Mike Bain, and by Grace Monckton.

Grace, the only woman in the party—in her twenties, and recently divorced—had discovered a strange affinity with O'Brien, tough American hunter—obsessed with his slaughter of the baboons. She is as yet unaware of O'Brien's ruthless determination to wipe out any potential threat to his own survival. Jefferson Smith makes this bitter discovery when he finds himself forced into the desert at gunpoint by O'Brien. To live or die . . . One less to feed . .

O'BRIEN returned to the valley just as the sun came up. He was very tired, and it seemed an eternity before he reached the cave and slumped in the sand, exhausted.

"Where's Smith?" Mike Bain asked in the darkness.

"He's gone."

"Gone where?" It was Grace.

"He took off. Said he was going to find a way out of here. Said

he was going to save us. I tried to stop him. He fought me, threatened to brain me with a stone. This was way out where we came to real bushveld."

"You should have stopped him," Bain said.

"I know," O'Brien said. "But what the hell could I do, shoot him?"

They were all silent for a while.

"Has he got any chance?" Grace asked.

"He hasn't got a chance in hell," Bain said. "Sturdevant didn't make it. How could Smith? You shouldn't have let him go."

"He's got one chance in a hundred maybe," O'Brien said sleepily. "But I wouldn't bet on it. I told him it was suicide. He wouldn't listen."

O'Brien was asleep.

Sturdevant, the pilot, walked on.

He was in the Namib Desert. There was no doubt about it now: the hot wind at his back heading for the cooler ocean; the dreadful sand desert, the land sloping downwards, the river which ran for a time and then frittered itself away in the heavy sand. At times the wind was so strong that it picked up the sand, swirled it along, creating sandstorms.

He might make it to the sea, to the Skeleton Coast. His rifle was gone. He had used up the ammunition and left the weapon back in the gorge.

He drank again and then stumbled on, found a place to hide from the sun. The pools were running out; he could not risk any more daytime walking. The water tins were empty.

The Namib. A thousand miles of sand running along the sea and drifting back in some places a hundred miles. He was somewhere in it; every step forward was a step closer to the sea.

And the sea would be salt. Cold. The icy-cold Benguela Current swept up from the Antarctic. If he reached the sea he could somehow survive or he would die happily in the cold water.

Night came and he walked on. He was barefooted, for his shoes had fallen apart long ago. He was beyond fatigue. He walked and slept but it was more from habit than necessity. His body was now nothing more than bone and corded muscle, gaunt and almost weightless.

The moon came and the landscape turned bluish white; the cliffs were gone, replaced by sloping sandbanks. After a time he left the river course and walked along the banks, looked for lights, roads, listened.

He grew very tired, sat down in the sand.

Keep moving!

He obeyed. He got up and walked on. There would be no more pools, for the river bed ran through pure sand.

And then in the dead of night a strange sound that he heard but did not understand for a long time, a familiar noise that reached his drugged brain. The sound of ocean surf.

He started to run and saw the moonlight shimmering on the ocean, ran towards the dark waves that rolled in and curled violently as they died on the hard beach. He fought loose from his pack, threw the water tins to one side.

He stood and let the sea slosh over his bare feet. He had been allowed to live and complete the incredible walk. He'd save the others now.

He sat down and let the sea run round him. It was cold. He took a mouthful and then spat it out, the dryness gone from his throat. He walked along the beach and found tyre tracks. He began to follow them. He saw a building in the distance, a small white building on the dunes, safe from the heavy Atlantic surf. He hurried towards it, walking between the tracks he'd followed, the wide tracks of a truck or Land-Rover.

The door was locked. There was a sign: the building was the property of an international diamond monopoly. He had made contact with the civilised world. He was somewhere along the coast of South-West Africa.

He broke a pane of glass and forced the single window up, crawled in. The small building was a combination storehouse and living quarters.

He found a can opener and ate tinned beef and peach halves and whole corn. He made a pot of coffee, found the aroma strange and almost sickening and decided not to have any.

Then he curled up on the bunk and tried to sleep, listening to the surf pound on the desolate beach . . .

It was difficult to sleep. He saw them in his dreams: Mike Bain and Grace Monckton and O'Brien and Grimmelmann and the negro, Jefferson Smith. They were waiting for him, starving, sick, desperate, waiting for him to come back in a plane and save them. *It was his duty to save them, his duty . . .*

He came awake, suddenly. A strong light blinded and something was prodding into his leg, hurting him. Voices.

He sat up and the blinding light moved to one side and he saw that it was a flashlight. A big man was standing in the doorway, a white man with a flashlight in one hand and a pistol in the other. He wore a white-brimmed hat, a light windcheater and heavy working trousers. Behind him another man, younger, with a shock of blond hair and a thin moustache.

"Don't try anything, now," said the big man. "Just hold steady."

Sturdevant rubbed his eyes and yawned slowly.

"You were silly to try it this way," the big man said.

"Better give us the stones now," the other man said. He waved the shotgun.

"Stones?" Sturdevant asked.

"We mean it," the big man said. "Give us the diamonds now and it'll go easier with you later."

"Diamonds?" Sturdevant said. He began to laugh. They had come with guns, not to rescue him but to arrest him.

They thought he was a thief, a diamond poacher.

He cleared his throat.

"My name is Sturdevant. I'm a pilot. My plane went down inland from here, hundreds of miles I guess, a hell of a walk anyway. Somewhere deep in the Namib. My plane went down. Crashed. There are five people trapped back in there, on a black mountain sitting all alone in a desert of pure sand. They're starving to death. I made it here, all the way across the sand, down a dry river bed."

"You *walkéd* here," said the one with the fair hair. "You say you walked here from the interior?"

"Yes."

"Impossible. You should have made up a better story . . ."

The big man motioned to Sturdevant to get off the bunk and go outside. Sturdevant did and felt the other man behind him with the shotgun.

The big man snapped on the flashlight, blew out the lamp, and closed the window. He took out a ring of keys, selected one and locked the door.

They walked down to the beach. It was cold. They came to a Land-Rover and put him in the front seat. The lights came on and the motor roared and the truck rolled forward down the hard-packed sand with the surf roaring on one side and the gloomy dunes on the other. Sometime later the headlights hit a sun-bleached sign:

PROHIBITED DIAMOND AREA

TRESPASSING STRICTLY PROHIBITED

Hours later they came to a group of dark buildings. Two elderly men came and stared at Sturdevant as they took him to a small cement annexe with narrow slits for windows and a heavy oak door with rusty iron hinges.

Sturdevant stiffened. The big man pushed him inside and began to close the door, shutting out the night and the air.

He was fighting the door, trying to hold it. He heard the raw scraping metallic sounds as they locked it. He was in darkness.

He grasped the iron bars, took a deep breath and shouted as loud as he could.

"*Let me out of here!*"

IT was late afternoon and they had come back to the cave after hours of foraging in the hot sun. Mike Bain and Grimmelmann slept. Grace had taken some of the bottles and quietly left them, heading up the canyon towards the pool. She had rested there for a while, filled one of the bottles and gone on. She waited for O'Brien to come. He almost always came back by climbing out of the gorges where they met the mountain and descending the path that they had climbed long ago when they scaled the peak.

She had to be alone with him. All he thought about was the hunting, the questing, food. He barely noticed her as a woman,

a beautiful woman. She couldn't wait another day, another night. She had to be with him. Now. Alone.

She walked on. He would hold her soon, kiss her.

She saw him coming towards her, walking barefooted and easily, shirtless, wearing only his dirty white shorts. He saw her, scowled. came on. She felt her heart beating.

" Any luck? " she asked.

" Nothing," he said. They stood looking at each other.

" Where're the others? " he asked.

" Back at the cave. I went out for water and then started walking." She held up the bottle of cool water. " Want some? "

He came towards her and took the bottle, drank from it. She walked away to the shade under the black wall of rock and sat down in the warm sand. O'Brien followed, put his rifle on top of a big boulder, sat down next to her.

She leaned back against the rock, closed her eyes.

O'Brien kissed her. Her arms came up, found his shoulders held him, pushed him away; she was dizzy.

" Why did you do that? " she asked.

" Because you wanted me to, Mrs. Monckton."

She smiled. " I suppose I did, in a way. I've never been kissed by a man with a beard." She tried to laugh but nothing came.

He kissed her again, harder. She struggled for a time and then surrendered. She no longer cared. He was hers.

" O'Brien? "

" Yes."

" Do you want me? "

" I've got you," he said.

She kissed him lightly. " I mean do you like me? I think I'm in love with you." She'd said it now. It had been easy.

" You want me like you've never wanted anything," he said.

" Yes, it's true. Do you love me? "

" No."

" A little bit? "

" Don't be silly, Mrs. Monckton." His hands were hot on her back now, his fingers digging in, hurting her.

" Please . . . you want to, don't you? You want me? "

" Not any more, Mrs. Monckton. I want what I haven't got and I've already got you." He picked her up like a child and put her on the sand. His bearded face was on hers, her neck. His hands were on the buttons of her skirt, the zipper. She was wide-eyed with fear and disbelief. She began fighting, squirming, punching, infuriated now, screaming, crying.

" I'll kill you, kill you, kill you—"

She was sobbing hysterically . . .

Grace was aware that she was alone; O'Brien was gone.

She began brushing sand out of her hair, and after a while she got up and fixed her clothes and started down the canyon. The fierceness was gone from the sun now; evening was coming; it was cooler

She came to the pool. O'Brien was there, pouring water over his head, rubbing his face, his neck. She went to him and kissed him, standing tiptoed, and he reached down and picked her up and carried her to a rock slab, his fingers hard on her thigh.

" I'm sorry," she whispered. " The things I said . . ."

He kissed her face, her eyes.

" I deserved it," she said. " I went looking for you. I suppose that isn't wrong. I want you so much, so much . . ."

" I want you too, Mrs. Monckton. But no cat-and-mouse games."

" Why do you want me? "

" You're a woman, Mrs. Monckton."

" Stop calling me that. I'm divorced, I'm free. I just wished you loved me."

" I love all women," O'Brien said.

She lay in his arms. The great ache in her was gone. Some day O'Brien would love her; there were things about him she feared and didn't understand but some day, when they were away from the mountain, he would be like other men and he would love her and take care of her.

JEFFERSON SMITH had been with the Bushmen for three days. They were heading somewhere, moving across the arid plains and through the sparse grasslands. The country improved; the sand desert fell behind as they moved north and there were more signs of animal life, more tracks and birds and cover. Smith remembered what Grimmelmann and Sturdevant had talked about: the Kalahari wasn't a true desert, it was just lacking in surface water. It was the Great Thirstland.

The day after the Bushmen had found him in the desert, he had gone with them and seen them make sip wells in the dry sand of an old watercourse and suck water from it. An old woman dug a hole in the sand deep as her arm would allow. She collected grass and rolled it into a tight ball the size of a grapefruit and put it in the bottom of the hole. Now a long reed was inserted into the ball of grass and all the sand pushed back into the hole.

The old woman took an empty ostrich shell and sat it upright in the sand near the protruding reed. From her bag of belongings she took a small stick. She sat down and made herself comfortable. Then she put the short stick in the side of her mouth and placed the other end in the opening of the eggshell. She grasped the hollow reed, put it in her mouth, and began to suck. For several minutes nothing happened. The old woman strained and Smith could see that her body was directed to the one effort; her shoulders bent and her old back strained. Sweat ran from her wrinkled face.

And all at once a trickle of water began to run down the short stick, from her mouth to the ostrich shell. There had been no water in the hole but the sucking had created a vacuum, and from the moist sand around had come the water, seeking the ball of grass

and penetrating it, leaving the sand behind, following the vacuum up the hollow reed. Fantastic—the reason why the Bushman could live where others perished.

Now they walked along and came to the beginnings of a vast grassland; sparse clumps of brown grass dotted the red sandy soil and scraggly trees became more common. Two hunters broke off from the group and trotted away to the west.

The afternoon died and they walked on until they saw ahead a trailing line of smoke in the sky and hurried to the hunters and their kill. They fell upon a big springbok and dropped the dripping meat into the fire. Smith ate two chunks of it before he stopped to rest. He was like the Bushmen now, gorging himself with meat when it was available, eating all he could hold. He was naked but he was not alone. The wild Bûshmen were his friends, and they tried to talk to him, smiling when he did not understand.

He felt sure that they would not kill him. They were wild but they were not brutal. They might hand him over to some white man, some district commissioner or police patrol. They would bring him somewhere, for they must know that he could not survive alone, without their meat and water.

He found a place to sleep and lay looking up at the great sky. How far was this from a city with electric lights and cars? How many miles, how many years, how many centuries . . . ?

Grace Monckton and Mike Bain walked down the valley to forage. Grimmelmann was resting in his bed. O'Brien had left while it was still dark.

They wandered for two hours along the cliff edge, finding lizards and chasing them, resting in the shade of great boulders, going on. As they got farther away from the cave the cliff grew lower and easier to climb.

Grace cornered a brown lizard and clubbed it to death. Mike cleaned it with a penknife and they wrapped it in a cloth.

" I think we could climb to the top here," Grace said.

Bain looked up, studied the faults, the long inclines. " Let's try it," he said. He had never been this far down on the cliff top. They might find a new supply of food, a colony of lizards.

They started up, not hurrying, picking their way along. They came to a sheer wall and stopped.

" There's only one way," Bain said. " I can reach the top if you can hold part of my weight in your cupped hands."

" Let's try," Grace said. " I don't want to go back the same way." She cupped her hands, braced her feet against the stone, waited. Bain studied her and the rock wall. He backed away and then ran towards her, put his bare foot in her locked hands and flung himself upwards. He felt her strain and push and then her hands parted. But he had a grip on the edge of stone above and he pulled himself up.

He lay flat on the hot stone, reached down for the girl and found her wrists. He pulled her up slowly and surely and she helped him, finding purchase on the rock with her bare toes.

They lay exhausted on the stone. The rest of the climb would be easy.

Bain became aware of her. He could smell her hair, her warm body; her breasts strained against the tattered, half-buttoned blouse; her golden thighs were only half covered by her ragged skirt.

She turned, saw that he watched her and smiled. She wondered about Bain; he was handsome in a haggard way.

They got up and continued the climb, wordless.

They killed two more sleepy lizards. Bain threw a stone at a small hawklike bird but he missed and they watched it fly away over the vast desert. He realised that he hated O'Brien. When night came Grace would go to him as she now did every night.

They walked on along the top of the escarpment and the rock was hot on their bare feet. They came upon a deep, well-like hole in the solid rock, a circular pit that was twelve or fifteen feet deep and the same distance across. They stood and looked down into it.

" What caused this? " Grace wondered.

" I don't know," Mike said. The sides were too smooth to allow anyone to climb down; he had an urge to descend into the pit but it would be impossible without a rope. " Maybe long ago the hole was a chunk of softer stone that got mixed up with the granite. Time and the elements might have worn it away."

" It's strange," Grace said.

Bain reached for her, found her wrist, held her. " Be careful, the rock's slippery." He pulled her back from the edge of the pit. She was close to him again, warm, sweaty, golden-haired, beautiful.

He let go of her wrist and walked on. She was O'Brien's.

A week passed. There were four of them now and the food that they found lasted longer. O'Brien shot a heronlike bird that he found roosting high on the cliff. And there were still plenty of melons and honey and lizards and good water. One night round the fire Bain suggested a hunting trip to O'Brien.

" I'm willing," said the big man. " We might be lucky and get a zebra or gemsbok."

" Anything would satisfy me," Bain said.

" We need more meat," Grimmelmann said. " Raw, red meat."

" You want to go tomorrow night? " O'Brien asked.

" Sure," Bain said. " I think I'm strong enough now to stick with you. You hunt and I'll lug the water. I'd like to see a nice sizzling chunk of meat again."

" We'll get something," O'Brien said. " And we might as well be out there hunting. All I can do here is stalk baboons and they're too clever for me now."

" I wonder where Smith is? " Bain said.

The others were silent for a time. They watched the fire leap against the blackened rock.

" He's dead," Grimmelmann said.

" There's always a chance that he might be holed up somewhere,"

O'Brien said. " After he left me he might have gone on for a few days and then stumbled upon a waterhole somewhere. He might be there now."

" Dead," Grimmelmann said. " Both of them dead in the sand. I hope you two don't get such ideas. I tell you there is no way in or out of this place except for Bushmen who know where to suck in the sand for water. For them it is nothing."

The others listened and the old man grew suddenly selfconscious. He looked at Bain and O'Brien. " Do not try to get out of here, do not get the idea that Sturdevant got, and Smith. They were brave men but foolish. We are a tiny speck in an ocean of desert and semidesert. If there was a way in, there would be signs of man here. White men would have carved their names on the soft stone near the water; there would be signs. No one between a Bushman and a modern man with an aeroplane can come here. You must know that by now. No others can cross the sand with wagons and oxen as they did in the old days and no man can carry enough water."

" They'll come back," Grace said.

" We will," O'Brien said. " This is a hunting trip. I've reached about the same idea as you," he said to Grimmelmann. " I'm going out after meat. When we get some we'll hurry back. If we have the water we'll camp and make biltong."

Bain and O'Brien slept late into the next day and when the sun grew weak they set off, each carrying makeshift packboards filled with the shells of ostrich eggs that were their water containers. And O'Brien carried his rifle. They walked in a new direction, resting each hour. When the sun came up they dug a wide trench in the sand, covered it with a few scarce lengths of thornbush, and draped their clothes over it. They drank as much water as they wanted and lay in the relative coolness of the scant shade.

" How do you feel? " O'Brien asked.

" I'm tired but so are you," Bain said. " I think I can stay with you if you don't push it."

" This life agrees with you," O'Brien said. " You look better every day. You've lost the fat and you seem stronger, have better wind."

" Except for the constant hunger I do feel better," Bain said. " If we only had more to eat—"

" We can't last long back there," O'Brien said. " Too many of us still, even with Sturdevant and Smith gone."

" Overpopulation," Bain said.

" I may try to make a break for it soon," O'Brien said.

" Don't be nuts," Bain said. He yawned.

" I might do it," O'Brien said. " We can't go on very much longer. Not four people."

" Maybe a plane will spot us," Bain said

" Ten years from now," said O'Brien.

Evening.

They got up and began walking across the sand that was still hot. Streaks of orange in the sky and then the sand became purple

and a breeze came. They stopped for ten minutes and sipped some water.

"Smith must have been nuts to try it," Bain said.

"I told him that," said O'Brien. He squatted in the sand, squinting, always alert for movement. For an instant he reminded Bain of the soldiers on Saipan, bearded and filthy and very dangerous in their holes. One of them had almost shot him by mistake.

"He was a good Joe," Bain said.

O'Brien nodded. He got up and Bain followed and they walked on. It became dark. The moon turned the landscape a greyish white.

Bain thought the night would never end. He fell behind O'Brien and then, when the hunter rested and waited for him, they decided it was best to walk apart. O'Brien first, ready with the rifle, and Bain behind.

Just before dawn a miracle happened. O'Brien walked up a rise, peered over it, and saw a great herd of gemsbok, hundreds of them standing silently and motionless in the moonlight. He blinked and unslung his rifle just as they began to race away. He fired three shots and brought down one of them . . .

They made a small fire and roasted strips of gemsbok meat, bolted them down half cooked. They drank deeply from the eggshells.

"I keep thinking about Sturdevant," Bain said. "He had the other rifle. Maybe he's still going."

"I'd like to think so," O'Brien said. "I liked that Dutchman but I think he's been gone too long. They'd be able to find this mountain of ours if anybody could get to the outside. But nobody knows we're lost."

Bain cut another piece of meat with the sharp hunting-knife, dropped it in the fire. "You think he's dead then?"

O'Brien nodded. "We might be twenty miles from help right this moment. Or five hundred and twenty. Sturdevant was just unlucky. The next guy may not be. Maybe Smith made it. He had a lot of water and maybe he'll be lucky."

The sun grew hotter. They scraped a shallow hole in the sand, pulled the carcass into it and covered it. The flies fought for it until the last, dying with the meat they sought, suffocating under the sand. O'Brien cursed them.

They picked up their packboards and walked on. A rock angled up from the stony soil creating a pocket of shade, enough for their bodies and the precious water. They crawled under it and fell asleep almost instantly.

The sun ruled the land and nothing moved. The ants fled underground to their cool caverns, to their cisterns of water. The heat shimmered across the baked land. The sun descended, grew weak, made long shadows. Evening came. A slight breeze.

In the shadow of the rock the two men slept.

Grace Monckton and Grimmelmann were eating breakfast when they looked up and saw O'Brien. He came up the canyon with a

great burden on his back. For an instant they thought it was Bain but as he came closer they saw that it was a heavy load of raw meat. The big man's shoulders and arms were caked with blood, sticky with sand. A swarm of small gnats and flies worried him.

He was too tired to speak. He went past them into the cave and they followed, helped him cover up the precious meat to protect it.

He stretched out on a torn blanket, groaned. They brought him water, honeycomb.

"Bain left me," he said. "Left. Gone. Just like that crazy Smith . . ."

"You came back *alone?*" Grimmelmann asked. "You permitted him to leave you?"

O'Brien closed his eyes. "He left while I was sleeping. Took all the eggshells but one. I just made it back to the last station. I followed his tracks for two, three hours. Had no water for much more. Lucky he left me the rifle."

Grace Monckton began to cry. She walked away and went to her bed. She wanted to lie in the darkness. Think. Mike Bain now. One of them. Throwing his life away on a slim gamble of finding the outside.

Now there were three of them.

O'Brien went off each morning and came back in the late afternoon with lizards he found in the far canyons. Grace and Grimmelmann went together and searched the nearby cliffs and the old haunts they knew so well.

Another dawn. Another breakfast at the cave's mouth after they had carried out the night fire and gathered their food before it. O'Brien had found nothing in the last two days. The meat was gone. They ate melons and drank warm water. In the evening perhaps they would have lizards.

"I saw bees the other day," O'Brien said.

"Where?" Grace asked.

"In the far canyon," he said. "I'd like to find a big store of honey. It would probably keep us alive, more than the lizard meat and the other stuff."

"I'll go with you," Grimmelmann said. "We'll bring some comb and see if we can't find the hive. When the sun is just right you can see them flying, follow them."

"Good," O'Brien said. "You coming, Grace?"

She looked at him. "No, it's too far to walk and climb. I'll stay here this time."

Grimmelmann waved his hand, nodded. "It is far. Even for me it is too far but I shall go. I am good with bees, I have a feeling for them."

"If this doesn't work I'll have to start going off into the desert," O'Brien said. "We need some more gemsbok. If only one of them would come here—"

"Maybe Bain will come back in a plane," Grace said.

O'Brien nodded. "I hope so. I feel guilty about him, and Smith too. When you get out there you get the feeling that there's

a fence or road beyond the next hill, over the next rise. It's sort of a strange disease that grips you."

Grimmelmann got up. "Let us find the bees," he said.

They left.

It took O'Brien and Grimmelmann two hours to get to the place that O'Brien had described; they had to cross the main canyon floor, climb the cliff and walk along it until they found a way down. Then they rested for a time in the shade and walked in the opposite direction down the third canyon until they were able to ascend the next ridge. At last they found themselves in the most distant canyon, the one they had started calling Lizard Canyon. It was half as broad as the main one and the least known. The two men rested again in the shade close to the spot where they had descended.

"It was foolish for me to come," Grimmelmann said. "An old man should have more sense." He fanned himself with his hand.

O'Brien said nothing. He sat upright, not quite relaxed, trying to make out something far away on the opposite ridge. It might be a gemsbok. A baboon. Grimmelmann knew that the big man hadn't heard a word he'd said. He stood up.

"Well, where are all these bees of yours?"

O'Brien was on his feet, moving away, ahead of him. "This way, only a few hundred feet." Grimmelmann followed, not hurrying. There was no need to hurry and he knew that his slowness upset O'Brien. And he was irked now with the hunter for not listening to him.

O'Brien stopped and waited for him. Grimmelmann came up and stopped. Close to the rock wall in the clean sand, in a spot that was always protected from the sun, was the bottom of one of the suitcases that they had brought with them from the plane. It had been made into a packboard and contained several ostrich eggs held in place by thin strips of leather and cord. The two leather straps had been fixed to slip over each shoulder. It was much like the other packs he had made for Smith and Bain, like the one O'Brien had fashioned for himself.

"It's for you," O'Brien said.

The old man looked at the pack for a long minute.

"I had a feeling about you," he said. "Did you force Bain to go, and Smith? I thought of that once. We only heard your version of what happened. But I will tell you this. I am not going."

"I made them go and I'm making you go," O'Brien said. "You will go in an entirely new direction; you are the fourth and you will make it. I have a map for you which will lead you to three more shells I planted out there on the hunting trips. After that you can start on these."

"Why did you make them go?" Grimmelmann said. "Why are there always those like you who force others to obey their will, to destruction?"

"We can't all stay here," the big man said. "You know that better than any of us."

"Then let us die," the old man said. "Let us eat the last melon and the last of the honey and the last lizard or whatever else and then die. There is no need for us to send each other to death in the desert. Sturdevant was a fool and went by himself, but the others . . . you have killed them. Their blood is on your hands."

"They had to go," O'Brien said.

"You have no right to decide who shall go."

"All of you will go," said O'Brien.

"I am not going," Grimmelmann said. "I'm going back to the cave. If I die there I have done my best. I will not throw my life away because of a man with a gun. I am tired of your kind. You have already destroyed me . . ."

"Go," O'Brien said softly. "Go or I'll kill you."

"I refuse," the old man told him.

"I'll shoot you," O'Brien said. He stepped closer.

"An execution?" Grimmelmann asked.

"Call it what you will," the hunter said. "It's all the same. Death."

The old man almost smiled. Threats, always threats.

"I'll fight you first," he told O'Brien. He shifted his feet, fixed the brim of his hat. His right hand went into the pocket of his old windcheater, found something there, something hard, the Bushman flint, the spearhead he'd found among the ostrich shells.

"It's too late to fight," O'Brien said.

Grimmelmann nodded. Too late, too late. His fingers curled round the long flint; his fist felt heavy; he felt the sharp point protruding knifelike from his sweaty hand. He had a weapon.

"Pick up the shells," O'Brien said. He came another step closer, waved the rifle towards the pack.

Grimmelmann's clenched fist came out of his pocket. He'd die fighting; he'd get O'Brien's gun, smash it; he'd hit the big man, scare him, hurt him. He would not obey. He started forward.

"*Stop!*" O'Brien screamed. "*Stop it!*"

But the old man came on, his fist raised, the two inches of sharp stone protruding from his fist.

"*Stop!*" O'Brien shouted and then the old man was upon him.

He waited until the last instant and then stepped aside, swinging the heavy rifle. The barrel hit the old man's right arm; Grimmelmann staggered, tried to regain his balance and went down heavily.

"You old fool," O'Brien said. "Can't you see that it's too late to fight?" He stood for a few moments and looked down at the old man. Then he turned and went off up the canyon.

Grimmelmann rested on the ground. His hand was bleeding. He had gripped the spearhead too hard. He sat up and let the flint fall in the sand.

A wave of dizziness came over him. He must get out of the sun, rest in the shade, and then go back to the girl.

His hand felt numb. He brushed it against his leg, wiped away the bloody sand, studied the half-inch cut in the palm and knew

that he was dying; that he would be dead in a matter of minutes.

The palm of his hand was blue-black and there were streaks of blackness moving up towards the ends of his numbed fingers and up to his wrist. There was Bushman poison on the flint; he had squeezed it too hard, cut himself. He had beaten O'Brien but he would die now of old poisons.

He sat in the sun and he was not afraid. It was better to die in the sun than in the cold of Europe. The sun was warm; long ago he had been young here, a long time ago.

Long ago. A Bushman sitting crosslegged with his weapons and poisons, readying himself for the hunt or for war against the white man. He daubs poison of great virulence on the stone point of a new spear. Long ago . . .

Grimmelmann was suddenly blind and there was a ringing in his ears. He let himself down on the sand with his left arm, felt the earth begin to spin under him, faster, faster, faster.

The poison reached his heart; he shuddered and died.

O'Brien came back to the cave as the sun was setting. Grace waited for him in the entrance with a few sticks of wood she had fouud. He was alone.

" Where's the old man? "

" He's dead," O'Brien said.

" I had a feeling when I saw you," she said. They were alone now, just the two of them. She wondered why Grimmelmann's death didn't shock her, and it came to her that she had somehow sensed it. And another thought came to her that she tried to shake away, that shamed her: there would be more food now for her and O'Brien and she would be totally alone with him.

" He cut himself on that Bushman flint of his," O'Brien said. looking for bees and he fell behind. When I looked back he was staggering, reeling, as if he couldn't see where he was going. His " There was poison on it and it killed him. We were going along hand was bleeding from a little cut. He sat down and his arm suddenly started to grow black. Five minutes later he was dead. There wasn't anything I could do. It was terrible, horrible. He found that Bushman flint in the kloof when we discovered the ostrich eggs and carried it around in his pocket." He walked past her into the cave and put his rifle in the niche.

Grace carried the fire into the cave and dumped the glowing embers on the ashes of last night's fire. O'Brien's bag contained four lizards and a wizened narras cucumber. The lizards had already been cleaned and she cooked them quickly on the wire grill that Smith had invented. They ate the meat with plenty of honey and shared the cucumber.

Night came, bringing the cold. They piled more wood on the fire and hurried into the sleeping-bag, shivering for a time, seeking the warmth of each other's body, relaxing.

" How did he cut himself? " she asked. She dug her fingers into his heavy shoulders, felt the great power in them. There was

something else about Grimmelmann's death that he hadn't told her, something vague and yet fearful that she could not voice.

"There's nothing more," he said. His fingers found her face and turned it, he kissed her mouth, her cheek, her neck. She thought of her ex-husband and he seemed so far away. Andrew Monckton, a gentle lover, kind and considerate. And that's all he had been, kind and considerate.

"We can make it now," O'Brien was telling her. "You and I can beat this place. Live. The two of us."

But now she wasn't concerned. Her arms were round his neck and she didn't care about Grimmelmann or survival or anything else except *him*. There was nothing else in the black cold world except O'Brien's body enveloping her, loving her, shielding her from the prehistoric night.

The two of them . . .

Grace Monckton sat in front of the cave warming herself in the morning sun. O'Brien had left while she was still asleep; when she had opened her eyes she'd been all alone in the cave, and it had frightened her. She quickly moved the fire outside, ate her meagre breakfast.

Somewhere in a gorge was O'Brien, a big silent shadow moving from rock to rock, seeking things to kill . . .

She added a few gnarled sticks to the fire. She and O'Brien were alone now and they would never leave the black mountain. They would not be rescued. They would stay here and grow old and die.

She went into the cave and drank what was left in one of the waterbottles. She picked up one of the empty ostrich shells and walked out into the sunlight again, headed for the pool. She would bathe and refill the water containers.

She made her way up the canyon to the pool, stood before it at last, started to undress.

Something moved in the rocks to her left. A man. Fear stabbed her heart . . . a wild Bushman . . . she turned wildly and began to run, heard herself screaming for O'Brien.

Mike Bain caught her and held her, cupped his hand over her mouth. She stopped struggling, terror fled from her eyes. He let go.

She stood before him, sobbing. But the tears welled up from happiness now.

Mike was back . . . he was not dead, he was not dead.

"Where's O'Brien?" Bain asked. His voice was tense and hard.

She couldn't talk, she was wiping tears from her eyes, trying to button her open blouse.

"Where's O'Brien?"

"He's hunting," Grace said. "Where did you come from? O'Brien said you left him, tried to reach the outside. We thought you were dead."

Bain took her arm and led her into the shadow of a rock slab. They were out of sight here.

" O'Brien abandoned me out there, Grace. He told me to keep walking, not to come back. He had his rifle on me, said he'd kill me if I returned. And he did the same thing to Smith. He admitted it."

She didn't believe him. He was filthy and haggard and his voice cracked; he looked as if he might faint any moment. The sun had made him a little crazy.

" Sit down, Mike," she said. " We've got some food. You need rest, lots of rest."

" He'll kill you next," Bain was saying. " And Grimmelmann and me. If he finds I'm back he'll shoot me. That's why I waited for you here, to tell you."

" Grimmelmann's dead," she said.

" Dead? "

" He's dead," Grace said. " He cut himself on that flint spearhead he found; it still had poison on it."

" Who was with him? You? "

" No. He went off with O'Brien to look for honey. In one of the other canyons."

" O'Brien's a murderer, Grace. He killed Grimmelmann. He tried to kill me. He made Smith go off in the desert at the point of a gun. Two days out from here he did the same with me. Don't you believe me? "

Grace Monckton slumped down in the sand. " It can't be true, Mike. You must be wrong. You've *got* to be."

" You believe me," Bain said.

She looked at him for a long time. " I don't know. There's a streak of ruthlessness in him. He might be capable of it." But she loved him. She belonged to him.

" Do you need water? " Bain asked. He nodded towards the bottle and the big shell.

" Yes."

" Let's get it then and go back to the cave," Bain said. " We must be there when O'Brien comes. I've got to get the rifle away from him. He'll kill me if I don't get him first."

" *Kill* him? " Grace asked.

" If I have to," Bain said.

" What are you going to do? "

" I don't know. I should kill him, I suppose, but I'm not capable of executing a man, not even him."

" I can't believe it," Grace said.

" There's a good chance of O'Brien being the sole survivor," Bain said. " Some guy will fly over. O'Brien will be waiting. Alone. He'll tell them about the crash and how we all died one by one. Grimmelmann died of poison and I died of snakebite and you died of sunstroke. O'Brien will survive."

Grace shuddered. " Stop, Mike. It's too horrible." It was impossible. They hurried away from the pool.

They waited in the cave for O'Brien.

And he came.

Grace stood in the entrance, hands on hips, and saw him in the distance. Her lover.

"Here he is," she said simply, and in the darkness Bain grew suddenly frightened; his hand began to sweat on the wrench.

O'Brien came. Barefooted, hatless, without a shirt, hard, long-haired, beautifully muscled and burnt deep brown by the African sun—a man who thrived on privation and hardship.

"Very soon now," Grace said. She stood and waited and wondered if she could go through with it. O'Brien was a hundred yards away now, fifty, twenty-five. He carried a lumpy bag in his left hand. Tsamma melons. He held them in the air.

"I found some nice ones," he said.

"Wonderful," Grace said.

He came on, stood before her, the rifle in one hand, the bag in the other. He bent suddenly and kissed her, her lips, her neck.

He started into the cave. "O'Brien?"

He turned, scowled.

"There's something I've got to tell you."

O'Brien waited. He wanted to go into the cave to drink and rest.

"About Grimmelmann," she said. She took a deep breath. "I think you killed him." She had to know, she had to decide before she'd let him go into the cave where Bain waited.

"I didn't kill him," O'Brien said.

She believed him. She had a choice to make between truth and hallucination, between the two men.

He started into the cave again.

"Stop," she said. "Mike Bain's in there. Don't go in. He's waiting for you with his wrench."

O'Brien swung his rifle up and backed away.

Grace moved away from him. "He's in there in the dark," she said. "He said you abandoned him in the desert. He's in a terrible state, imagining all sorts of things. We've got to help him. He thinks you're going to shoot him."

But O'Brien didn't seem to hear her. He stopped, moved backwards. It grew very quiet. There was the hum of insects and the implacable heat beating down on the hot stone. A long minute passed. Two.

Mike Bain walked out of the cave. He stopped and looked at Grace and then at O'Brien. He seemed to weave, to totter, a dirty, bearded man in tattered rags that had once been a white linen suit, squinting in the harsh sunlight. His left hand was knotted into a fist, his right hand held the big wrench. "Tell her the truth," he said. He started to walk to the big man.

O'Brien backed away. "Don't come any closer," he said. "Stay away. I'm warning you."

But Bain didn't stop. "Tell her the truth!" He came on, the wrench held higher, the left fist reaching out.

O'Brien backed away. "Stay away from me, Bain, or I'll have to hurt you. You've been in the sun; you're sick. Put the wrench down."

Grace sobbed and ran towards Bain. She grabbed his arm and for a moment he was helpless. O'Brien was running towards him.

He swore and flung Grace away with a sudden desperate fury. The girl fell heavily in the sand. Bain leapt away and crouched with the big wrench ready, waiting for O'Brien.

But the big man stopped. They were ten feet apart.

"I'll shoot you," O'Brien said. "Put the wrench down or I'll kill you." He was afraid of what the wrench might do to his rifle. If Bain rushed him and struck the barrel, it would be useless.

He stooped and placed the rifle on the sand. Then he rose.

Grace got up and walked towards O'Brien and Mike Bain, shouted at them. The ground spun and she lost her balance and slumped to the sand.

She saw Bain and O'Brien circling each other like boxers in a ring. Bain's wrench glinted in the sun. The big man was bare-handed and feinting. Once he got his hands on Bain it would be over in an instant. He was big enough and strong enough to pick up the smaller man and hurl him ten feet.

And then he charged Bain, reaching for the wrench. For one terrible instant Bain hesitated; then his left fist opened and he flung the fine cave sand into O'Brien's face. And in the same instant he swung on his left heel, the wrench held straight out from his body. He spun round, his back towards O'Brien who momentarily fought blindness and unbalance. The wrench hit the black-maned head. O'Brien took one step, then fell to the sand.

Grace blinked. Bain had won. O'Brien had underestimated him. And maybe she had. Maybe he was telling the truth. O'Brien had been afraid of him, strangely afraid.

She got up and went to Bain. "He was afraid of you," she said.

"*Believe me*, Grace, believe me for ten minutes. If I can't prove it, I'll let him go."

She nodded. They dragged O'Brien out of the sun into the cave. Bain tied his hands behind him with a piece of the long rope.

"Can I trust you to bring me the rifle?" he asked.

Grace left. She came back and handed the rifle to him. It was loaded. He found more bullets in O'Brien's small bag.

Bain motioned Grace away. She retreated into the darkness deeper in the cave.

O'Brien opened his eyes, struggled up, cursed when he realised his hands were bound behind him.

"Untie me, Bain."

"Not a chance," Mike said. He stood in the cave entrance with the rifle. O'Brien could be dangerous even with his hands tied.

"What did you do to Grimmelmann?"

"Nothing," O'Brien said. "You think I killed him. You're wrong. He was a stubborn old fool. I wanted him to take a crack at crossing the desert but he refused to go. I had the whole thing set up: water points, a map, a pack of shells, everything. But he wouldn't go. Then he came at me with that spear point. He fell and cut himself and died from the old poison on it."

"Then you did kill him," Bain said.

"I told you the truth," O'Brien said. "I didn't kill you, did I? I could have shot you."

"Why didn't you try to make it across the desert?" Bain asked. "Why old Grimmelmann?"

"His luck was as good as mine," the big man said. "He was old and his life was almost over anyway. If he'd failed he still would have helped us."

"One less mouth to feed?" Bain asked.

"Sure," O'Brien said. "What else?"

Gracé Monckton came out of the blackness, walked into the sunlight, and stood next to Mike Bain.

"You lied to me," she said to O'Brien. "Now I can't trust you. I can't believe you. Ever."

"And I'm afraid of you," Bain said. "If I turn you loose, give the rifle back, I think you'd shoot the two of us. Then you'd have all the food."

O'Brien threw back his head and laughed long and loud. He looked at Grace. "Do you really believe that?"

"Yes," Grace said. "What you did to Smith is close to murder. It is murder."

"I thought he could find help for us," O'Brien said.

"Why didn't you try it?" Bain asked.

"I told you. I'm more valuable here. I can hunt. I got meat for you, didn't I? I knocked off a lot of baboons. You're in the wrong now. There are three of us left. We've got to stick together."

"We're going for a walk," Bain said. "Get up."

"Where?"

"Get up!" Bain turned to Grace. "Bring the coil of rope and the canteen filled with water. He's going in the pit."

"Don't be silly," O'Brien said. "Let me loose." He turned to Grace. "Don't let him do this to me, Grace. Can't you see what he's got in mind? He wants to kill me. He wants you. The sun drove him crázy out there." But Grace was gone.

He got up slowly and shook the sand from his head. They moved out of the cave.

"I have no choice," Bain said. "It's me or you."

They came to the strange round hole that they had discovered so long ago. It was fifteen feet deep and almost as wide, an unusual pit in the living rock with sides as smooth as glass, scoured by the wind-blown sands of thousands of years.

"Lie down," he told O'Brien.

"Help me, Grace," the big man said. "Don't let him put me down there. I can't help you from there. You'll be all alone with a crazy man."

"Lie down," Bain said. "Don't make me knock you out again. It might be fatal next time."

O'Brien got down to his knees and then rolled sideways until he was prostrate. Bain moved away and circled the pit, found a

suitable place to tie the rope. He made it fast round an elevated slab and threw the other end into the hole. He went back to O'Brien and stood close to him, the rifle pointed at his head.

" Untie him, Grace," he said. " Loosen the knot and then back away." The girl bent down and began working on the tangle of rope round the big man's wrists. In a few minutes they were loose and she backed away behind Bain, out of O'Brien's reach.

" Don't get up now," Bain said. " Do just as I tell you. If you get to your feet I'll shoot."

" I believe you," O'Brien said.

" Crawl to the rope," Bain said.

" You're afraid of me, aren't you? "

" You're damned right I am," Bain said. " That's why you're going in the pit."

" I think I might stand up and take my rifle back," O'Brien said.

" Go ahead," Bain said. " It might be better for you that way."

But O'Brien didn't get up. He crawled to the rope and slid down it to the bottom of the pit. Bain pulled up the rope and threw down the canteen of water. " We'll be back later with some melons and honeycomb and whatever we can find for you," he told O'Brien.

" Thanks," the big man said. " I'll remember when I get out of here. I'll be nice to you for a while." He walked back and forth in the bottom of the hole like a caged animal.

" Can he get out? " Grace whispered. She was suddenly afraid, seeing him loose again.

Bain shook his head. " A lizard couldn't get up those walls."

Before night came Bain and Grace returned to the pit. They threw down two blankets, Sturdevant's sleeping-bag, a sweater. The nights were cold on top of the escarpment but it would be impossible to bring enough wood for a fire. And it would be dangerous. Bain wasn't fully convinced that O'Brien was helpless in the big hole; he did not relish the idea of throwing wood down for the big man. O'Brien was too inventive, too clever.

They tossed six melons down to him and some honeycomb and two pieces of dried meat.

" Get me out of here," O'Brien said.

" I'm afraid of you," Bain said. " And so is Grace."

" That can't be true."

" It is," Grace said. " Something happened to you, something I feel, something I don't even understand."

O'Brien put his head back and laughed; his white teeth flashed and the long black hair hung down, touching his muscled shoulders. He shook his head as if it were all some enormous joke.

" You better let me come up, Bain," O'Brien said. " I'll go along with this for a while because you're upset and you're blaming me for everything. In a couple of days I'm going to get mad and get out of here and then I might put you down here. Both of you. I'm warning you, Bain, for the last time. Let me out."

" I'm sorry," Grace said. " We can't do it. You turned Smith

and Mike loose in the desert and you tried it with the old man. We'll keep you here until help comes." She turned to Bain. " Let's go now, Mike."

They left and O'Brien was alone again. Night came and it grew cold and he lay in the sleeping-bag, his brain turning slowly on the possibilities of escape.

And he would escape; there was no doubt in his mind. He would escape because he would direct his entire energy and will to it. Escape from the pit was survival and the secret of survival was adaptation. It was as simple as that. To survive now one had to be pliable; one had to adjust to new codes and ideals and morals. The mind had to change.

O'Brien grunted. He'd survive because he was the most pliable of all of them. He had no beliefs to discard, no codes, no rules; for him it was easy.

Bain visited the pit twice each day and saw that O'Brien had water and food.

" Bring me some more dried meat, will you? "

" No."

" When I get out of here, you'll be sorry."

" When you come out of there," Bain said, " you're going to prison, maybe worse."

" Don't be silly, Bain. I'm going to escape from here very soon now. And when I do, be careful. I'm going to hunt you down. In the dark . . ."

Bain left and went back to the cave. It had grown cooler and by the time they had carried the embers inside and built the night fire, the wind had picked up and there were distant rumbles far away. They heated some of the biltong and ate it with tsamma melon and honey. Before they were finished a strange phenomenon occurred.

It began to rain.

The rain did not fall on soft land, heavy land, land that would absorb it, store it, hold it.

It fell on parched, bricklike slopes; on land long ago gullied and scoured and creased with a billion hard wrinkles. It fell in desolate gorges and on the high ridges of the black mountains.

A million streams reached the canyon floor, spilling down the grooves cut by old rains, aeon-old, time-worn . . .

Mike Bain and Grace left the fire and walked slowly out of the cave and stood in the rain, lifted their faces upwards, let the water pelt them. It was cold and wonderful; they began to laugh and cavort. Bain grabbed Grace and kissed her and shouted something to the sky.

She ran away and splashed through a shallow pool that was growing in one of the saucerlike depressions a hundred yards from the mouth of the cave. Bain followed and she turned suddenly and kicked water into his face. He caught her and they stumbled into the water. He kissed her again and she grew quiet.

"I loved O'Brien," Grace said. "I've got to tell you that I might still love him."

"I'm sorry," Bain said. "I understand."

"I thought he killed Grimmelmann but somehow it didn't seem important when we were both alone here. Nothing mattered. We were two people. And I wanted him, Mike. He was all I wanted and then you came back with your damned rules."

"I know," Bain said. "I liked him too, in a way. I'm sorry."

The water fell about them; they watched it striking the surface of the pool—a billion skipping drops made a wild music.

"I didn't *care*," Grace said. "That's what bothers me. It was wrong, so terribly wrong."

"Wrong ended when the plane crashed," Bain said. "I wanted to kill myself rather than starve to death. You wanted to live and you wanted him. Don't brood about it. It's past."

"We all followed our natures," Grace said. "I wanted a certain man and you wanted to quit and O'Brien wanted to survive. We might be as bad as he is. Maybe Grimmelmann's death wasn't murder, maybe Smith and Sturdevant are alive. How can we judge him?"

"I'm not judging him as much as protecting myself from him," Bain said. "I want to live too; and I want you to live. We're all guilty, but you and I worry about it, we're sorry. That's what makes us different from O'Brien."

"He's not evil, Mike. He just has a different set of laws from ours. If right and wrong ended when the plane crashed, then something else took over. Maybe it was O'Brien's way, I don't know. The situation here is bad, not O'Brien; he just tried to cope with it in his own way."

"Survival of the fittest," Bain said.

"Something like that."

There was a long silence.

They stood up and ran back to the cave, to the shelter, to their fire.

"Don't kiss me again, Mike," Grace said.

"I'm sorry."

They dried themselves on rags and bits of old clothing, threw extra wood on the fire.

"When we get out of here I'm going to start courting you," Mike said suddenly. "If you're available, I mean."

"Try me," she said.

"You mean it? Me?"

"We've got a lot in common, Mike," she said. "I don't know how I'd get along with anyone else; we've been *here*, Mike, other people haven't. They'll never really understand us after this."

They were warm now. The fire felt good. Outside the rain continued to fall.

"You'd better be sure with me," Mike said. "You have a knack for picking the wrong guys."

Night came. They ate again and went to bed.

The rain fell on O'Brien.

He opened his eyes and got up slowly like a tiger uncurling after a long day's sleep. He lifted his face to it and smiled; it spattered on his face, his lips. He turned his palms upwards in a gesture as old as man, assessed its power, welcomed it. He walked round the sheer walls, wet now and glistening. Tiny rivulets spilt down from above and he stood under one of them and let the water shower over him. The rain built up. He was standing in an inch of it now, two inches, three; the tiny waterfalls pouring into the great hole were thicker, more violent, arching farther outward from the edge of rock above.

O'Brien stood in a foot of water. Fear struck him. He was going to drown. He began to yell, to scream; he cupped his hands and shouted through the heavy rain.

"*Bain! Help . . . help . . .*"

And he knew that it was useless and stopped. He would die now and there was nothing he could do unless Bain came, and Bain would not come until the rain was over and it would be too late. The pit would be half full of water and he would be floating in it like a dead fly.

He found the centre of the pit and stood and the rain became so intense that he closed his eyes. A yard of water covered the bottom of the hole; the little waterfalls joined now—sheets of water pouring down from the long inclines above, running off the smooth rock into a great cistern.

To drown after all the escapes from the desert, to drown in a world where water was almost never seen, to drown after he had sent the others off to die of the sun and thirst.

The water rose about him, inch by inch.

Bain sat up slowly, unzipping the bag. The cold air poured in on him. The fire had burnt low and the rain outside had not slackened. He got up, shook Grace.

"O'Brien," he said. "We forgot about him. He's up there in the pit and it's probably half filled with water." He saw the big man struggling in the water, trying to hold on to the polished rock. It was something neither of them had thought of—the water, the sudden rain. Grimmelmann had told them about it but somehow it never seemed possible in such a pitiless desert world. Unless there was some unseen and unknown cleft in the bottom of the pit it would fill with water and drown whatever was in it.

Grace stepped out of the sleeping-bag and hovered near the fire; it glinted on her golden hair.

"What are you going to do?" she asked.

"Go up," Bain said. "He might be hanging on, waiting for us."

Somehow they reached the pit, fighting the night and the rain and the slippery path. Bain carried the rifle and helped Grace with his free hand and they worked up the storm-lashed cliff and rested for a few moments when they were safe on the top of the ridge. The rain had diminished but the darkness was almost

complete and they felt their way along the familiar path. An inch of water washed their bare feet and gusts of wind whipped at them. They slipped and fell and pulled each other along and after a long while they stood and looked at the pit.

In the darkness they could see only a part of it but they saw that it was completely filled and overflowing with water. It had not seemed possible in the cave but now, standing in the swirl of water that ran down the incline into the pit, they realised that the crevice had been filled in the first few hours of the downpour.

They circled the pit carefully, stooping low, peering into the water, calling out for O'Brien, but there was no sign of him and no answer.

" He's down there in the bottom," Grace said. " It wasn't our fault. We didn't think about the rain." She felt sick.

" He might be alive," Bain said.

" I know," Grace admitted. " I have the same feeling."

They were frightened now and shaken from the climb and the cold rain. Grace found herself praying that O'Brien was really dead. Bain no longer trusted the darkness.

They hurried away, back down the cliff, to their cave. The black night was O'Brien's province. They felt fear pressing on them from all sides.

O'Brien staggered away from the pit, fighting the terrible nausea that had seized him once he was freed from the water and the glassy rock.

Some instinct pushed him along a way that he had travelled long ago and almost forgotten. The baboons' den, the cave where the troop had originally lived, the place where he had ambushed them the first time. He staggered along in the darkness towards the high peak and then turned and made his way down the great outside escarpment where the drop was sheer, hundreds of feet.

He came to the crevice where he had waited in the night for dawn to come, for the baboons to emerge. He went on and found the den and crawled into it, smelt the musky scent of the animals and then collapsed on the dry floor.

He woke several hours later, his body stiff and painful. He crawled deeper into the den and massaged his limbs until the circulation improved, until his body tingled with the pain. He closed his eyes and waited for dawn.

He fell asleep with the nightmare of the pit in his mind.

He relived it all again. The water reached his hips, his chest. He could see nothing now but the torrents of water cascading down on him. It grew dark. The water was cold and his legs were almost numb. He began moving them and lost his balance, fell sideways, found himself swimming, fighting the water to stay up.

Swimming!

He found the slippery sides of his prison, held on to a slight bulge in the rock. There was only the pitch-blackness of the night now and the water under him and the roar of water as it cascaded

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into the pit. He was going to live now, escape. He would endure the long hours until the water level permitted him to reach up and pull himself out of the hole. He was going to live, live, live.

And later on his raw fingers found a thin lip of granite and he lifted himself until his left hand grasped the edge of the pit. His whole body shook from the terrible strain but he swung sideways and his toes found purchase and he was up and out in a tremendous heave of his body, lying on the slippery rock like an exhausted fish, the water swirling past him . . .

Grace Monckton sat with the rifle in her hands, her eyes searching. She sat in the mouth of the cave and a few yards behind her, out of the sun, was Mike Bain. He was sound asleep.

A week had passed since the great rain. The valley was green; grass grew in the stony soil and trees came to life and bushes turned thick and leafy; the dry winter was over and summer was coming and everywhere there was life. Flocks of strange birds came and made nests in the inaccessible crannies of the black cliffs. Bees filled the air with their droning and swarms of them came from nowhere and colonised secret clefts that their scouts had discovered.

Two days after the rain Mike Bain shot a gemsbok within sight of the cave mouth. It had come like the first one, across the sands, unaware that a new force had come to the gorge to create a new balance of life and death. They skinned the big animal with care and butchered it as Grimmelmann had taught them.

They watched the miracle of life with an interest they had never known; they saw a dead land come to life, saw strange things push up from hard earth, from bulbous seeds once dormant and sterile; they almost sensed a change in the soil with their bare feet, saw insects multiply, and listened to new sounds in the dusk. And they were part of it, tied to the great cycle of life and growth and death.

They had plenty of food and the nights were milder. They caught many migrating birds near the pool in nets and bizarre traps that Bain devised. In one week they had progressed from the brink of starvation and despair to a time of plenty.

But they did not enjoy it.

They felt that O'Brien was alive and waiting for them. They felt that his eyes were upon them, that he was high up among the crags and gloomy ridges following their movements, studying them while he bided his time and grew strong again.

They knew that if he were alive he would strike soon, suddenly, without pity.

They went back to the pit and searched the whole area. The hole was filled with water but each day the level dropped. They knew that his body might be on the bottom but it would be a long time before they were certain, for there was ten or twelve feet of water in the big pool.

They saw no sign of him. They looked upward towards the black peak and scanned the fissured cliffs a hundred times each day, expecting to see him again, naked and black-maned, standing as he

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did, relaxed and graceful. They looked and saw nothing, but as the days went by they sensed his presence, felt his eyes upon them.

They waited for him to come.

The cave, Bain knew, was a death trap for them if they wandered too far from it and allowed O'Brien to enter it. He could wait in the dark or hide in the tunnel they had found and creep upon them at night.

They stayed in the cave and took turns sleeping; they banked the outside fire and found that it lasted until dawn. They strung wire and cord across the cave's mouth and hung tins and utensils and other noisemaking things to give alarm if anything broke the string or pushed the wire. And then Bain dug an arc-shaped ditch six feet behind the wire, a ditch filled with pointed stakes to impale any intruder who might charge through the web of wire and string in hopes of taking them by sudden assault. They felt safe at night now, one of them always awake, waiting for O'Brien to come through the cave mouth.

And they were cautious outside as well. They stayed in the open, away from certain parts of the cliff where he might be waiting to crush them with rocks.

" Maybe it's all in our mind," Mike said one day as they sat in the cave entrance.

" He's alive," Grace said. " I can feel him watching us from the high places. And sometimes in the night I feel that he's out there in the dark, creeping close to the cave. I'm afraid."

" I'm afraid too," Mike said. " But sometimes I wonder why. Surely he'd have shown himself by now."

" We've got to act as if he were alive," Grace said.

" You're right. If he is alive then his only weapon is surprise."

They sat silently. Flies buzzed around them and from the cliffs came the bark of a baboon. Grace Monckton was deeply tanned, her blonde hair blending with her bronze skin.

Bain scratched himself and yawned. He fingered his heavy beard and wondered if they would both die here. Living was easy now but the bad time was coming; the rains were over and it would be at least seven or eight months before they came again. They couldn't wait that long.

He turned to Grace.

" Why the hell doesn't somebody *come!* "

" They will," Grace said. " We've got to believe that. Every day makes the chances better."

The canyon was green and filled with millions of tiny yellow flowers. The trees were fat with leaves.

" What would you do if O'Brien came down from the pool right this minute? " Grace asked.

" I hope I'd have sense enough to shoot him."

" Would you? "

" I think so. He murdered Grimmelmann. He murdered Smith. And he swore to kill me."

Another night settled over the black mountain . . .

AN AEROPLANE flew over the valley.

It came so fast, so suddenly, that it was gone before they had recovered from the surprise. It was midday and at the outside fire they were roasting a bird caught in the nets.

Bain bounded into the cave and came out with two torches.

"Run," he shouted to Grace. "Hurry."

The torches caught fire and he ran after her, two burning torches in his left hand, the rifle in his right. They ran down the valley, away from the cliffs into the flatlands. The plane was far away but the noise was still in their ears, the sound of power, civilisation, salvation.

They ran easily. They would be seen now if the plane turned and made another sweep over the gorges. The ground levelled off, the stones and sand replaced by the hard-baked red soil; tender grass grew in some spots and delicate white flowers. They came to the first big pile of rubbish: thornbush and dead camel's-thorn and wads of dead grass. Bain set it on fire and handed the torch to Grace. They ran across the valley towards the other pile.

The plane came back, slower this time it seemed. They stood waving the torches and the roar of the engines was deafening as it passed overhead. They found themselves shouting. The plane went on, then turned sharply to the right. They had been seen; the plane was heading out of the valley so that it could turn and come in for a landing.

It was a small plane with lettering on one side, a fragile object floating in the sky above the jagged black cliffs, the type of small plane that is usually privately owned. It reminded Bain of the crop dusters he'd seen in many parts of the world; he wondered if it would hold two more people.

They threw down the torches and stopped running.

"What about O'Brien?" Grace asked.

"He'll be here," Bain said. "Any minute now." They looked to the cliffs, shielding their eyes from the sun; they searched the black walls round them and saw nothing.

"I'm afraid," Grace said. "Even with you and the rifle and the plane. I'm still afraid."

"If he's here, he'll come," Bain said.

"What do you mean by that?"

"He might not be here, Grace. It could all be imagination. Something that grew out of the fear you had of him. And my fear. If he survived the pit he'll come down and get in the plane. What's he got to lose? His word is as good as ours. We can't prove he did anything."

"You think he's dead then?" Grace asked.

"I think he's alive," Bain said. "But if he doesn't show, then I'll close the book on him. I'll consider him dead, drowned in the pit."

The plane was a speck growing larger. But they did not watch it; they looked towards the cave and the ridges on both sides of them. They looked for O'Brien.

And then the plane was almost upon them, roaring and blowing red dust over them—a plane on the ground now, moving past them on rubber wheels, a fantastic sight, almost beyond their belief. They ran towards it, found that they were crying, holding each other, laughing, waving.

The plane stopped and a small door opened. The noise of the engine died as it idled. A long leg came out of the doorway and a big man stood before them, a middle-aged man with rimless glasses and a clean white shirt. The lettering on the side of the small craft was plain: TSUMSEBI MINING

The man looked at them for a long minute.

"Well, we found you," he said.

Bain smiled. It was difficult to talk. This man had eaten a real breakfast in the outside world, he wore shoes, he had a haircut.

And Grace was suddenly aware that she was almost naked; she drew closer to Bain, saw that the pilot was leaning away from the controls, looking out of the tiny door at her.

The man was talking to them. "We volunteered to join the search when the word came out about you. They picked up some guy along the coast in the diamond fields. Said he was a pilot, that his plane was down here. They locked him up, didn't believe it, but somebody checked the story and discovered that he was telling the truth after all. Funny."

"Sturdevant," Bain said. "We thought he was dead."

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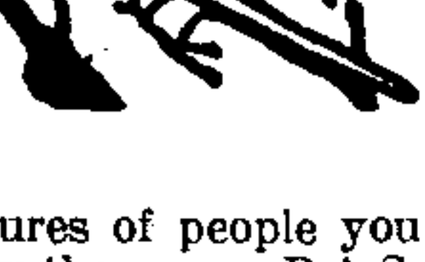
I WISH I COULD

Sketch



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"Did he really walk to the sea from *here?*"

"Yes," Bain said. "He was our pilot. He must have." So Sturdevant was alive. He wanted to cry.

"We can't cut the motor," the man was saying. "We're low on fuel now. Are there any others?"

"Others?"

"They're dead," Grace shouted above the engine noise.

Bain looked back along the cliffs. No one. No movement. O'Brien was dead. In their fear they'd convinced themselves that he was still alive.

"The others are dead," he said. "We're the only survivors."

And they got into the plane and flew away.

O'Brien watched the plane go.

He stood on a great slab of black stone and the sun glinted on his bronzed body. He scratched himself and rubbed his short pointed stick against his hard calf. He was alone now. Bain and the girl were gone; Grimmelmann was gone; they were all gone. The mountain was his. Once the canyon had been dominated by the animals. Now it was his canyon. Its summer wealth belonged to him. . .

And then one day the baboons trapped him.

He was hunting lizards along the top of the outside ridge, the smallest one that resembled a thumb from the top of the high peak. It was the shortest spur but there was no way down from it.

He was halfway out on it when he heard them barking. He looked back and then climbed to a high slab and let them see him; he let the wrench he was carrying glint in the sun, shouted at them, grimaced. But they did not retreat; their leader urged them on, bristling at the enemy who was alone now in the sun.

He shouted and advanced, threw stones at them. They backed away but came forward again. There was no time to build a fire, make a firebrand; there was no way down the dizzy cliffs that surrounded him. He began to back away, his mind seizing on a dozen ways of fighting them or escaping and rejecting them all. They had him. They'd trapped him. He would die.

Now they were drifting around him, closing in, forcing him to the edge of the cliff. And there was excitement in them.

He edged away but the semicircle followed, closing in. They'd rush him and it would be over. But he'd kill too; he'd kill one of them. There was a cold cramp in his stomach but it wasn't fear, it was excitement—excitement that was cold and logical and human.

He found his spot, the sun behind him. He waited.

The troop stopped moving. They found places and squatted on the ledges, on the flat black rock, watching him. Then one of them broke away and bounded towards him, sullen and cautious: the new leader. He was the first; the others would break away any moment now and swarm over him.

But the other big males did not move. They sat tense and motionless until the tension became too great; then they exploded

in a fit of jabbering. The leader moved back and forth in front of him, twenty feet away, a mastiff with an ape's body. He charged, but in the last instant, before the spear jabbed him, he recoiled and rolled away. The troop screamed approval. Now he was up, circling, and O'Brien moved, knowing somehow that the others would not attack from behind.

This was a duel, a trial by combat.

He stabbed with the short spear, keeping the weaving animal away, working him round, trying to keep the sun in his eyes.

The leader rushed again; he jabbed viciously, hit the baboon's chest. The leader grabbed and the spear was gone, torn from his grasp almost without effort. Now there was only the wrench. He crouched lower, his hands sweaty on the hot steel. The leader backed away from him, fingering his bloody chest. In the rocks around them the silence was total, no muscle moved.

The animal looked at his bloody fingers, then seemed to forget the wound as he came closer and circled. There would be no feinting now; there would be a final rush and one of them would die.

They circled like boxers, waiting. The wrench glittered, swayed like a cobra's head. The leader's long arms searched the space between them, measuring it. Then the baboon lunged forward, mouth open, yellow fangs ready.

But the wrench was quicker. It flashed through the air, blurred, silvery. It smashed against the big head. The baboon stumbled away, forgetting him, reaching weakly for his head. Then he died, sprawled on the black rock.

O'Brien stood, fighting for breath. There was a low moan from the troop. All of them stirred, the hair rising from their necks. Now anything could happen. It was up to him. He stood glaring at them. He picked up the spear and walked towards the baboons as if they didn't exist, striding with determination. A big male moved towards him, fangs bared; the troop waited.

O'Brien didn't stop. He leapt forward to a raised slab, filled his great lungs with air. Then he screamed: a wild, terrible scream that had never been heard before on the black mountain, a cry of such power and ferocity that it caused the young to whimper and cringe, back away, run. There was a split second when the remaining males stood trembling, uncertain. Then O'Brien charged, waving the glittering wrench and the two-pronged spear. He ran straight at the big warrior in his path and another scream started and the air trembled and shook with it.

The animals fled, terrorised, beaten. O'Brien stood in the sun, chest heaving, muscles rippling beneath taut copper skin.

O'Brien began laughing, and as he walked along, the narrow canyon below caught the sound and brought it back to him, deep and genuine and elemental. © William Mulvihill 1961

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ARGOSY CROSS-WORD

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Solution on Page 110

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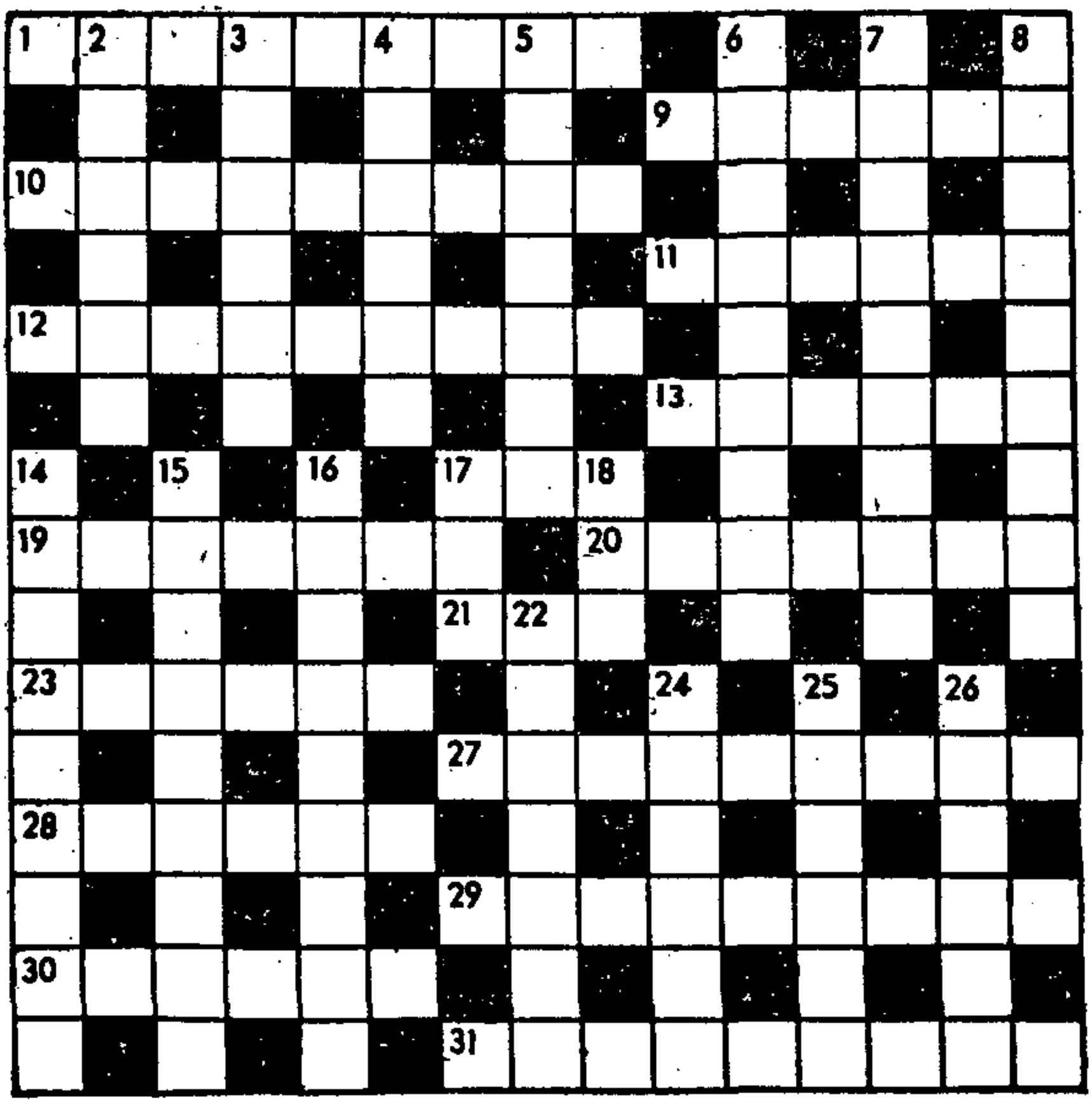

CLUES

Across

1 Pouchy type down under (9).

9 In this human I lack fibre (6).

10 Wild Mabel dies in Lake District (9).

11 Artist in canine madness (6).

12 Urn, fur, and tie in household effects (9).

13 Indian victory for Wellington (6).

17 Talk about fuel ! (3).

19 Mean thing ends in fury (7).

20 Optical muddle's up to date (7).

21 In April it's prox. (3).

23 Bribed to become a tool (6).

27 Clumsy French right-hand-man ? (9).

28 May Falstaff's pal be deadly (6).

29 Pocket portrait (9).

30 This boulevard's in Hollywood (6).

31 Hawk of novel progress (9).

Down

2 A case for chivalry (6).

3 Prop sounds like short Chinese run (6).

4 Set ape for Spanish cash ? (6).

5 Republic starts inclusive, continues exclusive (7).

6 Indent for it ! (9).

7 It's said that liberty is eternal this (9).

8 I film aces, just like (9).

14 Gripping greeting (9).

15 This edging's not a bit-part (9).

16 Brazenly lacking in whiskers ? (9).

17 " Full many a —— of purest ray serene " (Gray's Elegy) (3).

18 Pigpen starts in style (3).

22 Greed for mixed caviare (7).

24 As evil a case as any (6).

25 There's a rodent in the cavity (6).

26 Fruit found in Corinth (6).

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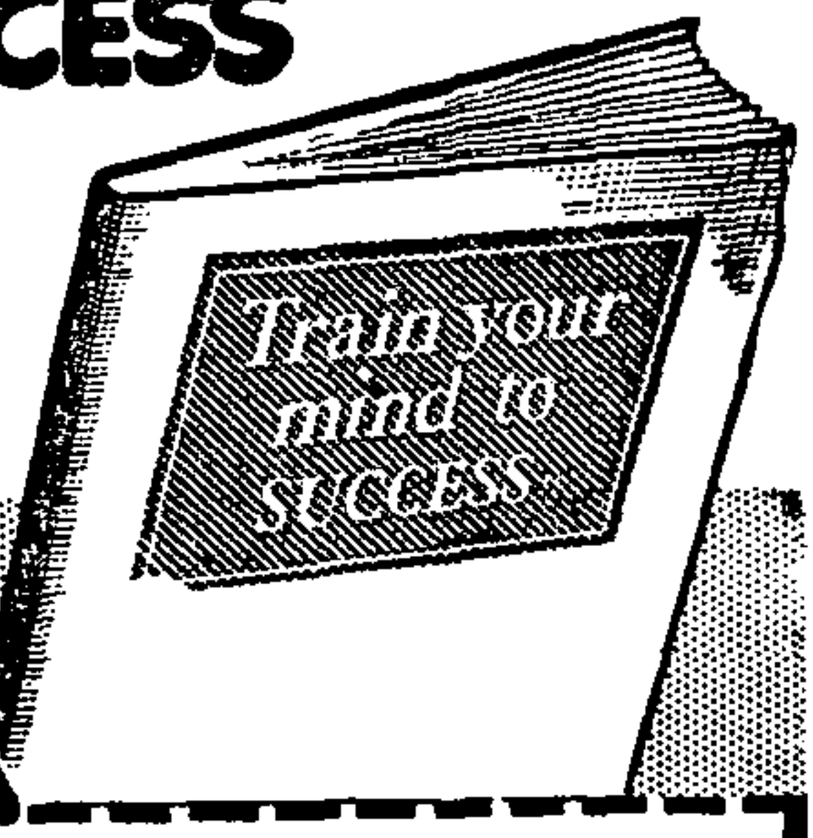

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